**The experiences of adoptive parents with their children's education:
an interpretative phenomenological analysis**

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Abstract

Research suggests that adopted children often experience challenges in school, including cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, usually due to adverse pre-adoption experiences. Other research suggests that schools sometimes hold misconceptions about the needs of adopted pupils. Parents play a mediating role in their children's education through their interactions with schools, so this study sought to investigate the lived experiences of adopted parents concerning their children's education.

The study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis framework. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six adoptive mothers. All had at least one adopted child of primary school age, who had attended a school in the UK for at least one term following their adoption.

The transcripts were notated, analysed and interpreted using the steps suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). Five participants reported overwhelmingly negative experiences with schools, while one participant reported a more positive experience. Six superordinate themes were identified: 'Every school is different'; 'Transitions'; 'Parents taking action'; 'Learning'; 'The power of people'; and 'IMPACT!'. Each of these contained several subordinate themes.

Several conclusions were drawn from the data. First, the variety of experiences reported suggests that schools across England and Wales vary in their recognition and support of adopted children. Second, most participants in this study felt ignored by schools and needed to fight to have their children's needs met. Third, it became clear how strongly individuals within schools can alter the educational experiences of adoptive families, both positively and negatively. Finally, a clear message from all participants was the impact that their children's school experiences had on life at home, and vice versa. The main implication was that schools need greater support to recognise, understand and meet the needs of adopted children. Educational psychologists are in a strong position to facilitate this.

Declaration

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DEdPsy.

Signed: *Alice Clarke* (Candidate)   **Date:** 29/04/20

STATEMENT 2

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is it being submitted concurrently for any other degree or award (outside of any formal collaboration agreement between the University and a partner organisation).

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DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own independent work, except where otherwise stated, and the views expressed are my own. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. The thesis has not been edited by a third party beyond what is permitted by Cardiff University's Use of Third Party Editors by Research Degree Students Procedure.

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Summary

This thesis has three parts: a major literature review, an empirical paper and a critical appraisal.

Part One begins with a description of the literature search, including sources and search terms used. Next, there is a critical overview of attachment theory and other theories of social development in early childhood, followed by a discussion on trauma and adverse childhood experiences. The next section considers attachment, trauma and adverse childhood experiences in the school context. The focus then moves to the concept of adoption. Research into adoption-related benefits, difficulties and outcomes is critically discussed. The review then moves on to look at research into adopted children's experiences of school. The penultimate section narrows in on research investigating education from adoptive parents' point of view. The final section presents the academic and professional rationales for the study presented in Part Two.

In Part Two, there is a summary of relevant literature, followed by a comprehensive account of an empirical study which investigated the lived experiences of adoptive parents concerning their children's education. Details are given of the methodology and procedure, which was based on a framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Six semi-structured interviews were carried out with adoptive parents in England and Wales. The emergent themes were synthesised across accounts, resulting in six superordinate themes, which are presented in the Findings section. The final section of Part Two discusses the findings in relation to previous research and psychological theory. Strengths and weaknesses of the research are considered, followed by implications for educational psychologists and suggestions for future research.

Part Three is a reflective and reflexive account of the development of the researcher. It begins with an exploration of how the rationale and research question were developed. Next, each step of the research process is submitted to critical reflection, and the decisions made at each stage are explained. Finally, contributions to knowledge are discussed, followed by ideas for dissemination, and the relevance of this thesis to the work of educational psychologists.

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List of abbreviations

ACEs	adverse childhood experiences
ADHD	attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ALN	additional learning needs
ALNCo	additional learning needs co-ordinator
ASD	autism spectrum disorder
ASF	Adoption Support Fund
ASSIA	Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts
BEI	British Education Index
CAMHS	child and adolescent mental health service
COMOIRA	Constructionist Model of Informed Reasoned Action
CYP	children and young people
DfE	Department for Education
DMM	Dynamic Maturation Model
EHCP	education, health and care plan
EPs	educational psychologists
ERIC	Education Resources Information Center
FASD	foetal alcohol spectrum disorders
IPA	interpretative phenomenological analysis
IWM	internal working model
LA	local authority
LAC	looked after children
NEET	not in education, employment or training
PACE	playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, empathy
PDG	Pupil Development Grant
PEF	Pupil Equality Funding
PP+	Pupil Premium Plus
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items of Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses
PTA	parent-teacher association
SEND	special educational needs and/or disabilities
SENDCo	special educational needs and disability co-ordinator
TA	teaching assistant
TRM	Trauma Recovery Model

The experiences of adoptive parents with their children's education: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

Part One: Major Literature Review

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Part One: Major Literature Review

1 Introduction

Adopted children are a small but vulnerable population in UK schools (Gore Langton & Boy, 2017). These children are likely to have experienced early adversity, trauma and loss (Adoption UK, 2019a; Selwyn & Meakings, 2017). Despite all the benefits offered by adoption, many adopted children continue to experience difficulties, some of which become apparent when they start school (Zill & Bradford Wilcox, 2018). Research suggests that adopted children are more likely than non-adopted children to have difficulties with learning, behaviour, emotions and social skills (Department for Education, 2018a). As a result, attending school can be a challenging experience for them.

Research also suggests that school staff are not always aware that adoptees may continue to face challenges despite having been placed with their 'forever' family (Gore Langton, 2017; Syne, Green, & Dyer, 2012). Misconceptions exist that children are 'mended' by the act of adoption, and will no longer require support in school (Golding, 2010; Stewart, 2017), despite evidence to the contrary (Hodges, Steele, Hillman, Henderson, & Kaniuk, 2005; Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010).

Educational psychologists (EPs) work with adopted children and their families (Osborne, Norgate, & Traill, 2009). EPs must understand the multiple complex factors affecting how adopted children present in school so that they can provide context, guidance and support to schools and adoptive families.

This research explored the lived experiences of adoptive parents by asking them about their experiences with schools. The parents involved provided insights into their interactions with schools, including how effectively they feel schools have recognised and supported their children's post-adoption needs.

The following literature review provides a theoretical and empirical background to the question which the study in Part Two sought to explore: What experiences have adoptive parents had with schools, and how do they make sense of those experiences?

1.1 Overview of literature review

This literature review uses a narrative rather than systematic structure, due to the multitude of different topics and research methods involved in the areas considered relevant. According to Grant and Booth (2009, p. 94) narrative literature reviews allow coverage of a broad range of subjects, "at various levels of completeness and comprehensiveness".

The review begins by considering some of the theoretical underpinnings relevant to adoption, starting with the core tenets of attachment theory and some more recent developments. Next, the idea of trauma is explored, alongside some research into adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The next section looks at research into attachment, trauma and ACEs in the school context. The focus then shifts to adopted children and the range of needs they may continue to have after adoption due to their early experiences. This section includes descriptions of policy and provision for adopted children, such as additional school funding. Finally, existing research on how adopted children fare in education is reviewed, including parental perspectives.

1.1.1 *Terminology*

The decision was made both in this literature review and the following empirical paper to use the terms 'adopted children' and 'adoptive parents', rather than 'child who was adopted' or 'parent who has adopted'. This decision was based on the common usage of these terms in the existing literature. The author recognises and appreciates that language and terminology preferences vary and change over time and does not intend to imply that adopted children are in any way lesser or ancillary to their families.

1.2   <u>Search terms and sources</u>

A search of these five databases ensured good coverage across social science and education: PsycInfo; Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts (ASSIA); British Education Index (BEI); Education Resources Information Center (ERIC); and Scopus.

Search terms included "adopted children", "adoptive parents", "education", and "school". Truncated search terms increased the range to include similar phrases. See Appendix A for detailed search terms.

A process of reference list harvesting helped to identify additional sources. Search engines such as Google and Google Scholar were used to find other relevant information. Grey literature such as government reports and unpublished research were included when appropriate, with the recognition that they may lack the rigour of peer-reviewed research.

The database searches found 1356 papers. See Figure 1 for a Preferred Reporting Items of Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) diagram of the search and sift process (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). A PRISMA diagram shows the stages of carrying out a thorough search of the literature and aims to address inaccurate reporting due to sub-optimal search strategies. Other records were added to the literature pool using 'snowballing' methods. After 157 full-text articles identified through the databases searches were reviewed, 127 were considered relevant to the literature review.
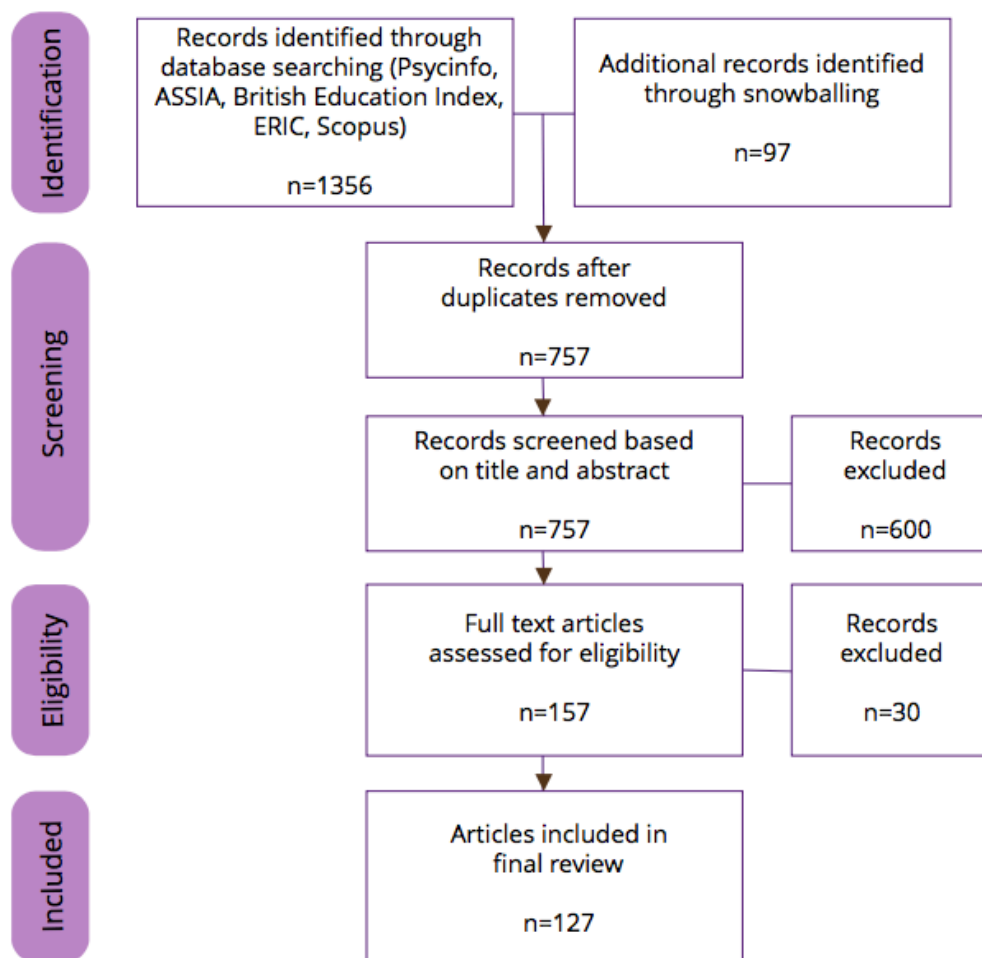
Figure 1 - PRISMA diagram

1.3 Inclusion/exclusion of research

Based on a review of titles and abstracts, articles were excluded if:

- they were not relevant to adopted children or their education;
- they were not written in English;
- they were a review rather than an original document;
- they used the word 'adoption' in an alternative sense (e.g. adoption of a new methodology); or
- the full text was unavailable.

International research was included because although the present study only focuses on the UK, adoptive families around the world face similar issues concerning education. The search was not limited by date, as it was considered essential to

explore how knowledge and understanding of adoption issues have developed over time.

1.4 Information about key studies

Further details about some of the key studies mentioned in the following literature review can be found in Appendix B.

2   Attachment theory

2.1   Overview of attachment theory

British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1953, 1970, 1991, 1998) first described attachment theory and it remains a dominant theory of social and emotional development in children (Harlow, 2019a; Smith, Cameron, & Reimer, 2017). Researchers such as Ainsworth (1964) and Main and Solomon (1986) made significant contributions which built on Bowlby's work. Figure 2 shows the fundamental concepts of attachment theory. For a more detailed explanation, see Appendix C.

First proposed by Bowlby, who argued that infants have a natural propensity to form attachments with their caregivers. Bowlby proposed a 'critical period' (6 months - 2.5 years) beyond which children could no longer change their attachment style (later revised to a 'sensitive period' of up to 5 years).

Secure base - when an infant has a secure attachment with a caregiver, they use this as a base from which to explore their environment, safe in the knowledge that they can return if they become distressed, and will be comforted.

Maternal deprivation hypothesis - Bowlby hypothesised that prolonged separation from the caregiver would have long-term consequences for the infant such as delinquency, and in extreme cases, affectionless psychopathy.

Ainsworth developed the theory to include two different types of insecure attachment, avoidant and ambivalent. A third insecure style (disorganised) was added later by Main and Solomon.

The Strange Situation - an technique developed by Ainsworth and colleagues. Used to observe how infants react in different situations with their caregiver and a stranger then assign infants to one of the categories of attachment style.

Attachment behaviour - used by both infants and caregivers to initiate and sustain attachments. The infant attempts to maintain close proximity to the caregiver (e.g. by crying) and the caregiver responds (e.g. by picking the infant up).

The Internal Working Model (IWM) - the schema that an infant develops based on their earliest experiences of attachment relationships. Acts like a 'blueprint' in future social encounters, leading infants to expect others to act in a certain way.

Attunement and containment - when a caregiver is attuned to the needs of an infant, they can provide containment. When the infant is anxious or distressed, the caregiver responds with comfort and understanding, helping the infant manage their feelings.

Figure 2 – key concepts of attachment theory

2.2   Criticisms of attachment theory

Attachment theory and its subsequent iterations have exerted a decisive influence over the way society treats children (Smith et al., 2017). Nevertheless, some have criticised aspects of the theory. Harlow (2019a) summarised the work of several authors who have provided critiques (see Table 1 for an overview).

Table 1 – Examples of the critical debate around attachment theory, based on Harlow (2019a)

Criticism	Counter points
Smith et al. (2017) and **Joseph, O'Connor, Briskman, Maughan and Scott** (2014) – rather than attachment style being set for life by an early age, a person can progress from initial insecure attachments by experiencing more positive attachment relationships later in life.	**Schofield and Beck** (2018) – Bowlby never intended to imply that attachment style was fixed in early childhood, but that the internal working model would change and adapt during later life. **Waters and Cummings** (2000) – it is not only the mother-child relationship that affects attachment, subsequent relationships, as well as cognitive and social development can change the IWM.
Smith et al. (2017) – Ainsworth's categories of attachment are rigid and pathologising.	**Harlow** (2019a) – argues that Ainsworth's original categories are still valid but have been refined and developed by others such as Duschinsky, Greco and Solomon (2015) to be used more flexibly.

Harlow (2019a) noted that attachment theory appears in current advice to social care workers (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2015) and education professionals (Department for Education, 2018b), despite criticism of some of its founding principles. Webber (2017) urges caution around the use of attachment labels, arguing that focusing on insecure attachment styles risks ignoring the possibility that the child could go on to form secure attachments, which roughly half do, according to Joseph et al. (2014).

2.3   The Dynamic-Maturational Model of attachment

The Dynamic-Maturational Model of Attachment (DMM) was developed by Crittenden (2008; Crittenden, Landini, & Claussen, 2001). It is one of several influential approaches to have emerged over the past decade, with others including the PACE approach (discussed in more detail in section 3.4) and Theraplay (Francis, Bennion, & Humrich, 2017). The DMM explains attachment as a collection of self-protective strategies which:

- are developed through the experience of attachment relationships;

- will vary depending on how individuals interpret information about safety and danger in their environment; and

- change as a person matures over the life course and has new experiences (Crittenden, Kozlowska, & Landini, 2010).

According to the DMM, experiencing danger requires humans to respond by adapting their behaviour. The model takes a strengths-based perspective towards behaviour that might otherwise be viewed as maladaptive (Wilkinson, 2010). Whereas previous attachment theories focused on what is lost when a child does not develop secure attachment, the DMM suggests that behaviours learned in stressful situations could be interpreted as advantageous adaptations that helped a person survive those occasions. These are carried forward as an attachment schema. For example, a child may learn that protecting their caregiver and reducing negative affect is an effective self-protective strategy. The child may try to cheer up and care for sad, withdrawn or vulnerable attachment figures. In adulthood, the person may seek out opportunities to care for those who are weak or needy. The DMM suggests that children may swap between different patterns of insecure attachment behaviour, depending on what will be most likely to increase security at the time (Harlow, 2019a). The DMM is considered more flexible than previous models, and less pathologising of attachment behaviours associated with insecure styles.

2.4   Adopted children and attachment

Research suggests that many children take into care experience emotional, physical and or/sexual abuse (Biehal, Cusworth, Hooper, Whincup, & Shapira, 2019; Van Ijzendoorn, Schuengel, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1999). These children may come to see their world, and the adults in it, as frightening and confusing. The nature of adoption means that adopted children are likely to have multiple and varied attachment experiences, depending on the age at which they entered the care system. Most will have experienced disrupted attachment in several ways (Harlow, 2019b; Selwyn & Meakings, 2017) including:

- loss of the birth parents (Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002);

- possible loss of birth siblings (Brodzinsky, 2011); and

- severance of relationships formed with temporary foster carers due to multiple placements (Soares, Ralha, Barbosa-Ducharne, & Palacios, 2018).

Selwyn, Wijedasa and Meakings (2014) analysed an extensive data set from the UK and found that only 0.3% of adopted children experienced a single foster placement before adoption. Unsurprisingly, insecure attachment patterns are more common among adopted children than non-adopted children (Minnis & Devine, 2001). Specifically, disorganised attachment is more common among adopted children than the general population (van Den Dries, Juffer, van Ijzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2009) and is the attachment style associated with the worst developmental outcomes (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

It is not the case that adopted children are unable to form secure attachments. In support of Joseph et al.'s (2014) hypothesis, research suggests that children can revise their internal working model (IWM) in light of positive post-adoption relationships (Hodges et al., 2005). However, Hodges et al. also suggest that rather than eradicating the imprint of early attachments, the new information assimilates into the IWM alongside previous representations. Therefore, the impact of insecure attachments may prevail for many years post-adoption, perhaps even into adulthood (Howe, 1998). For example, a maltreated child may interpret an

adoptive parent raising their voice as a threat to their safety and react disproportionately based on the IWM formed pre-adoption.

2.5 <u>Summary</u>

Attachment theory has been refined and developed over several decades and remains influential in professionals' understanding of child development. It suggests that a child's earliest experiences set the pattern for their later relationships. The DMM offers a more flexible and positive view of attachment and reframes maladaptive behaviours as adaptive. Adopted children are likely to have subpar attachment experiences, but research suggests that they can add to their IWM following more positive experiences.

3   Trauma and adverse childhood experiences

This section explores research into trauma and adverse childhood experiences, focusing on how early adversity affects long-term outcomes. Several approaches to supporting trauma-experienced children are discussed.

3.1   <u>Trauma</u>

The clinical definition of traumatic experiences is relatively narrow, including only "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence." (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 271). The Centre for Mental Health (2020) suggested that a broader definition encompassing both direct experiences and systemic factors (such as poverty and discrimination) would be more appropriate.

3.2   <u>Adverse childhood experiences</u>

The term adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) emerged in the 1990s from a large study conducted by two organisations interested in public health in the USA (Felitti et al., 1998). Bellis et al. (2015) defined ACEs as events taking place during childhood involving stress or trauma. ACEs may happen directly to a child (such as violence, abuse or neglect), or in the environment around them (such as substance misuse in the household). ACEs are associated with lifelong effects, including an increased likelihood of engaging in risky and health-harming behaviours.

3.2.1   *The prevalence of ACEs*

In early research on ACEs, 64% of participants reported at least one ACE, while 12.5% reported four or more (Boullier & Blair, 2018). These statistics suggest that while ACEs are relatively common, only a small portion of the population are likely to have been impacted at a significant level.

3.2.2   *ACEs and life outcomes*

Evidence shows that people with higher exposure to ACEs are more likely to engage in health-harming and anti-social behaviours, such as smoking, drug use and binge drinking later in life (Anda et al., 2006). However, other research suggests that not all children with ACEs demonstrate poor long-term outcomes which could be

explained by resilience. Bellis et al. (2018, p. 2) defined resilience as "the ability to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the development of a positive life course or the ability to resume one following periods of adversity". Bellis et al. identified a range of factors which may boost resilience to ACEs, including:

- cultural engagement;
- community support;
- control over one's circumstances; and
- availability of a trusted adult.

The concept of ACEs is not as simple as it may appear, with multiple systemic factors potentially modulating the impact of early adversity.

3.2.3   *Criticism of ACEs research*

The burgeoning interest in ACEs has attracted some criticism (Centre for Mental Health, 2020). The participants in the original ACEs research were predominantly white and college-educated (Boullier & Blair, 2018) raising questions about the universality of the list of commonly recognised ACEs. Furthermore, an objective approach to measuring specific ACEs (such as checklists of pre-defined ACEs) may be insensitive to the subjective nature of trauma. In other words, what constitutes trauma differs between individuals and is culturally and historically specific. Another criticism is that identifying the sources of adversity in a person's life is less useful than taking steps to prevent it in the first place (Boullier & Blair). In response to these criticisms, it has been argued that despite flaws, ACEs are an easily understood concept which has enhanced public awareness of the importance of early life experiences (Centre for Mental Health, 2020).

3.3   The impact of trauma and ACEs

Lewis et al. (2019) reported that before the age of eighteen, around a third of children and young people (CYP) in England and Wales experience some kind of trauma, and the same group are significantly more likely to experience developmental disorders (such as ADHD, conduct disorder and learning difficulties). Selwyn and Meakings (2017) reported similar statistics, while a report by the Centre for Mental Health (2020) argued for an explicit link between trauma and challenging

behaviour in CYP. While these findings cannot establish a causal relationship between early trauma and later difficulties, there is a correlation.

The impact of trauma on neurological development may partly explain this link. Childhood adversity impairs neurological development in several ways (Selwyn & Meakings, 2017). Evidence suggests that repeated or prolonged trauma affects the development of various brain regions. For example, ACEs can lead to chronic stress (Bellis et al., 2015), which in turn affects the development of brain structures responsible for threat perception, resulting in hyper-vigilance (Anda, Butchart, Felitti, & Brown, 2010).

See Table 2 for information on other ways in which trauma may affect development.

Table 2 – Information and research evidence about how trauma affects development

Area of development	Information and research evidence
Executive functioning	Bombèr (2007) Executive functions are cognitive abilities involved in planning and regulating behaviour, as well as cognitive processes including working memory, switching attention between objects/tasks, emotional regulation, and behavioural inhibition. Executive functioning processes operate in the pre-frontal cortex of the brain and are susceptible to impairment in children who have experienced trauma, through the intermediary of chronic stress as described above.
Emotional regulation	Bombèr (2011) Trauma-experienced CYP often have difficulty with emotional regulation. They may find it difficult to understand emotions (both their own and others) and may take longer than other children to return to calm following emotional arousal.
	Thompson (1994) The ability to regulate one's emotions relies on the capacity to identify different affective states and monitor and control levels of affect.
	Teicher and Samson (2016) Conducted a comprehensive review and found conclusive evidence that experience of complex trauma during the early years results in permanent adaptations to brain structures involved in emotional regulation.
	Schore (2000) Other research suggests that a child's early relationships determines efficacy of emotional regulation by impacting the formation of neural networks associated with emotion. Emotional regulation will naturally affect behavioural responses.
Self-esteem	Brodski and Hutz (2012) Found a negative correlation between self-reported memories of emotional abuse in childhood and self-esteem.
	Khodabandeh, Khalilzadeh and Hemati (2018) Found negative correlations between self-esteem and all types of ACES except sexual abuse and community violence.
Relationships	Putnam (2006) Presented research evidence on the psychosocial impairments caused by trauma. Trauma-experienced children, particularly those who have been in care, are far more likely to have a disorganised attachment style. This will affect their capacity to form positive relationships as they develop.
Play	Stein (2002) Presented evidence from a single case study that early trauma affects a child's capacity to engage in symbolic play.

3.4   Supporting children with trauma and ACEs

In response to increasing recognition of the impact of early adversity, several approaches have been developed to support parents, carers and professionals in their work with trauma-experienced children.

3.4.1 The PACE model

The PACE model (Hughes, 2009) aims to promote communication with trauma-experienced children that will facilitate positive relationships. Webber (2017, p. 321) described the PACE model as offering "a therapeutic attitude towards others that aims to deepen bonds and create acceptance and a sense of safety within a secure base".

The PACE model (Hughes, 2009) suggests four concepts to consider when interacting with CYP:

- Playfulness – the adult uses a light and playful tone, helping the child to enjoy moments of relaxed and humorous interaction.
- Acceptance – actively communicating to the child that the adult accepts them as they are, without judgement, and understands the feelings and motives behind their externalising behaviour.
- Curiosity – wondering aloud about a child's internal state without expecting an answer, rather than demanding an explanation for their behaviour.
- Empathy – the adult lets the child know that they are interested in their inner life, and acknowledge and share the feelings the child is experiencing.

3.4.2 The Trauma Recovery Model

The Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) is a therapeutic approach for supporting CYP who have experienced trauma. It was developed by Skuse and Matthew (2015) based on their work with young offenders. It reflected their realisation that most existing trauma interventions (such as cognitive behavioural therapy) required higher-order cognitive skills that their clients could not access. A core belief of the TRM is that young offenders are redeemable and can move on from their traumatic histories towards being reintegrated into the community. The model (Figure 3) has

six incremental layers of intervention, each associated with a level of developmental need. The model describes the underlying need that specific behaviours may be expressing and suggests suitable responses.

Adopted children may not have the same needs as young offenders (although they may share similar backgrounds). However, this model may be useful in schools to help staff respond to some of the complex behaviours that adopted children and other vulnerable pupils may display.

Figure 3 – The Trauma Recovery Model, from Skuse and Matthew (2015)

3.5   Trauma, ACEs and adopted children

Most care-experienced children experience some degree of neglect, and often physical, sexual or emotional abuse during their early life (Hornfleck, 2019; Selwyn & Meakings, 2017; Zill & Bradford Wilcox, 2018). A report from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2013) suggests that 74% of adopted children have experienced trauma. Comfort (2008, p. 40) noted that the effects of neglect and abuse will stay with a child for many years, even after adoption. She suggests that adopted children continue to deal with "the shadows of the past" and that their behaviour may, therefore, appear erratic, impulsive and irrational.

However, not all adopted children experience early adversity (Waid & Alewine, 2018) and not all those who do will be affected to the same extent. It follows that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to supporting adopted children will be insufficient, and professionals should be sensitive to individual histories rather than deploying strategies that may not be appropriate.

3.6   Summary

Research has established the negative implications of experiencing trauma or adversity in the early years. These include consequences for brain development, which may affect many areas of functioning. Both trauma and ACEs are prevalent among adopted children and may increase vulnerability in later life. The PACE approach and TRM (as well as other models) may be useful as pragmatic frameworks for supporting vulnerable children.

4   Working with attachment, trauma and ACEs in the school context

4.1   Attachment in schools

When a child starts school, their past experiences will affect their ability to trust school staff. Until CYP feel safe and secure in school, they will find it hard to concentrate on learning (Golding et al., 2013).

Bergin and Bergin (2009) argued that attachment underpins social and emotional functioning and is, therefore, a critical element of success at school. They suggested that insecurely attached children demonstrate lower social competence than securely attached children and are less likely to form strong friendships. They also presented evidence that secure attachment with one's parents and with one's teachers are both predictors of academic success. Correspondingly, Dingwall and Sebba (2018) argued that failing to support the attachment needs of CYP is likely to exacerbate:

- school exclusions;
- low educational outcomes; and
- mental health issues.

There is growing recognition of the benefits of schools becoming 'attachment-friendly' for all their pupils. Two LAs in Wales produced guidance (Higgins, Jones, Bevan, & Beddoe, 2017) based on attachment research which emphasises developing a whole-school approach to supporting care-experienced children. Another example is the Attachment Aware Schools project (Dingwall & Sebba, 2018) which provides training for school staff. A core concept is that school staff should act as attachment figures for children who may not experience secure attachment at home.

4.1.1 _The power of relationships_

School staff can become attachment figures for pupils, although this is more realistic in primary schools where there is greater consistency of teacher-pupil contact (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Dingwall and Sebba's (2018) participants (teachers and pupils) highlighted the value of strong adult-child relationships. Bergin and Bergin gave six recommendations for fostering secure pupil-teacher attachments. Teachers should:

- be sensitive and warm in interactions with pupils;
- have high expectations of pupils, and of the quality of their teaching;
- provide pupils with choices to increase their sense of agency;
- use non-coercive discipline strategies that level the power-balance;
- encourage kind peer interactions; and
- intervene directly to improve negative teacher-pupil relationships.

Geddes (2006) conceptualised classroom relationships and their connection to learning as The Learning Triangle (Figure 4). Pupils rely on adults in the classroom to help contain the anxiety they feel when attempting a new/challenging task. When pupils cannot trust adults as a result of their early experiences, they cannot access this containment as readily and are likely to disengage from the task. The model is further broken down into different attachment styles to support practice.

[This image has been removed by the author for copyright reasons.
It can be found using the following reference:
Geddes, H. (2006). Attachment in the classroom: the links between children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school. London: Worth Publishing.]

Figure 4 – The Learning Triangle (Geddes, 2006)

Harlow (2019a) emphasised the role school staff play in providing a secure base for adopted children. Harlow also noted that children with attachment needs may benefit from continuity of people, suggesting that relationships with adults in school should continue over the years, notably around times of transition. This is not usually possible in UK schools, where children move to a new teacher each year and have limited contact with the adults they previously saw daily.

Relationships with families are also meaningful. The Welsh school inspectorate body Estyn (2020) found that primary schools tend to be better than secondary schools at supporting pupils with ACEs. The difference seemed to be the quality of relationships with families, which tends to be better in primary schools.

4.2   Trauma and ACE awareness in schools

As the previous sections attest to, children who experience trauma and adversity are likely to experience the world as a dangerous and confusing place. They may have internalised bewildering messages about adults' behaviour and their safety. They have learned to continually scan the environment for threats, a considerable demand on their cognitive capacity which leaves little room for learning. Impaired executive functioning may make following instructions and self-organisation extremely difficult. A child who has experienced early adversity is likely to find the typical demands of school overwhelming.

Some schools have adapted their approach to supporting vulnerable children. Estyn's (2020) best practice report noted that schools in Wales have become more aware of ACEs and their impact, leading to wider implementation of whole-school support approaches. The report identified characteristics of schools with the best practice:

- they get to know their pupils;
- they provide a secure and nurturing environment;
- they take a non-judgemental approach to working with families, establishing trust between home and school; and

- school leaders recognise the emotional impact on staff of supporting vulnerable children and make staff well-being a priority.

4.3   Behaviour management in schools

Fancourt (2019) suggested that sanction-based behaviour management strategies are unhelpful for trauma-experienced pupils. Children with traumatic histories may experience high levels of shame (Bombèr, 2007), so interpret sanctions as rejection, further perpetuating the shame cycle. (It is noted that the book 'Inside I'm Hurting' by Bombèr, 2007, is not peer-reviewed, but does draw on peer-reviewed research such as Hughes, 2004 when discussing shame.) This process could increase externalising behaviour as the child expresses their shame and frustration. Hughes (2006) stated that schools must avoid using shame tactics to deal with challenging behaviour. Instead, he advocates adopting a therapeutic approach through empathetic conversation (as described above).

While schools are beginning to recognise the negative impact of sanction-based behaviour policies, The Centre for Mental Health (2020) reports that replacing them with positive behaviour management systems is not sufficient to address the systemic factors affecting vulnerable CYP. They suggested that schools should widen their focus and develop a nurturing whole-school environment, creating the right conditions for positive relationships between staff and pupils.

4.4   The benefits of a whole-school approach

Evidence suggests that children who have never been in the care system may also experience insecure attachment (Bergin & Bergin, 2009) or experience other kinds of vulnerability. This hidden group of children may have even poorer outcomes than looked-after or adopted children (Sebba et al., 2015). Webber (2017) suggested a whole-school approach is likely to benefit many pupils, not just those with easily identifiable needs. Estyn (2020) also advocated this approach. They argued that it is not always easy to identify vulnerable pupils, whereas a universal approach will benefit all.

Harlow (2019a) suggested that schools could promote attachment by:

- offering emotion coaching (Rose, McGure-Snieckus, & Gilbert, 2015) to support pupils with their emotional regulation;

- encouraging school staff to see the hidden meanings behind externalised behaviour; and

- developing a nurturing whole school approach.

Several whole-school models have been developed, such as the Trauma Informed Schools UK programme, the Attachment Aware Schools programme (Dingwall & Sebba, 2018) and in Wales, the Children Looked After Friendly Schools guidance (Higgins et al., 2017). All these approaches draw on evidence from psychological and educational research. However, Maynard, Farina, Dell and Kelly (2019) could not find any evaluation studies demonstrating the impact of whole-school trauma-informed approaches. Their findings suggest a need for more research into the effectiveness and impact of these models.

4.5   Summary

In the school context, attachment is a crucial underpinning of success in many mediums, so school staff should provide opportunities for vulnerable children to experience secure attachment. Thanks in part to the interest in ACEs, schools in the UK are gradually recognising the benefits of developing a whole-school approach to supporting vulnerable pupils. Doing so may benefit a broader range of pupils than anticipated. To achieve this, schools need to consider their attitudes towards relationships and behaviour management.

5 Adoption

Child adoption was legalised in 1926 in England and Wales and involves the placement of CYP who can no longer be cared for by their birth parents into new families (Harlow, 2019b; Juffer & van Ijzendoorn, 2007). Adopted children represent a small but vulnerable group in UK schools (Gore Langton, 2017). Three thousand five hundred seventy children were adopted from care in England in the year ending 31st March 2019 (Department for Education, 2019a). A further 309 were adopted from care in Wales (CoramBAAF, 2020). The most recent statistics available for Scotland and Northern Ireland gave their yearly adoption figures as 321 and 84, respectively (CoramBAAF, 2020).

5.1 Benefits of adoption

Many consider adoption the best possible outcome for children in care (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; King, Gieve, Iacopini, Hahne, & Stradling, 2019). Adoption is a positive and rewarding experience for many adoptive parents and their children (Evans, 2018). Adoptive families offer many advantages to children who have had a difficult start in life, including:

- a safe home in a supportive community;
- stable access to education;
- love and emotional support; and
- an aspirational approach to intellectual development (Zill & Bradford Wilcox, 2018).

Sadly, some adoptions break down. Selwyn et al. (2014) described the difficulties of measuring rates of adoption breakdown due to incomplete statistics and differences in how disruption is reported at different stages of the legal process. They estimated the rate of adoption breakdown in the UK is between 4-11% pre-order and between 4-19% post-order.

However, adoption alone does not determine a child's outcomes. A child's development occurs within a systemic context (including their family, their school and their community) and is influenced by biological and social factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

5.2 Difficulties experienced by adopted children

As outlined in earlier sections, adopted children remain vulnerable to a range of difficulties post-adoption due to the ongoing effects of their early experiences (Brodzinsky, 2011; Gore Langton & Boy, 2017). As Selwyn and Meakings (2017, p. 2) put it:

> "With a legacy of abuse and neglect and a propensity for other risk
> factors known to compromise development, a substantial number of
> adopted young people do present with complex needs that endure
> through childhood, adolescence and beyond."

There is a wealth of research investigating the psychological and educational challenges encountered by some adopted children (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010), some of which are explored in the following sections.

5.2.1 *Special educational needs/additional learning needs*

Research from the USA suggests that adopted children are twice as likely to have a condition that affects them cognitively, socially or physically (Zill & Bradford Wilcox, 2018). In the UK, the DfE (Department for Education, 2018b) reported that care-experienced children are more likely to:

- have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) / additional learning needs (ALN);
- have poor executive functioning;
- have difficulty forming relationships;
- have trouble regulating their emotions;
- have sensory processing needs;
- suffer from foetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD); and

- struggle with transitions and change.

Data gathered from parents suggests that adopted children are more likely to be diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) than non-adopted children (Adoption UK, 2019a).

Gregory, Reddy and Young (2015) suggested that around three-quarters of adopted children may be exposed to alcohol in utero, potentially resulting in neurological impairments that emerge as complex behaviour difficulties in later life. However, their research was based on a small, hyper-local sample of 45 children, and may not reflect the population-level prevalence of FASD.

5.2.2   *Mental health*

In a wide-ranging review of adoption research, Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010) found that adopted children were more likely to experience mental health issues than non-adopted children. Similarly, Adoption UK's (2018) statistics suggest around half of all adopted children have a mental health condition resulting from early adversity (Adoption UK, 2018). However, Uher (2010) makes the argument that early adversity may only partly explain poor mental health among adoptees. Based on Danish population data, Uher suggested that a birth parent's mental health difficulties may be a factor for children being taken into care, resulting in a higher than average genetic disposition to mental health issues among the adopted population.

Sturgess and Selwyn (2007) found that around half of the adoptive families they interviewed had received support from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). However, their data was drawn from a single local authority (LA), and may not represent the national picture due to variation in the availability of CAMHS in different localities.

5.2.3 *Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties*

Around 40% of adopted children may demonstrate substantial emotional and behavioural difficulties (Biehal, Ellison, Sinclair, & Baker, 2010). Compounding this, Asbury, Cross and Waggenspack (2003) suggested that adoptive parents are often unprepared to address the social and emotional needs of a child who has experienced early deprivation.

Brown, Waters and Shelton (2019) analysed longitudinal data and found that adopted children were significantly more likely to demonstrate externalising behaviour than non-adopted children. They attributed this increased prevalence to the impact of early trauma, despite the benefits offered by adoption. They also found that adopted children reported similar levels of internalising behaviour to non-adopted children, contradicting previous findings. Brown et al. suggest that their findings may be because the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (used to collect the data) is not sensitive enough to the specific kinds of internalising behaviour displayed by CYP who have experienced early adversity. The data was self-reported by adoptees, who may have been reluctant to reveal the true extent of their internalising behaviour or may have interpreted the questions in different ways.

Historically, teachers have reported higher instances of behavioural issues in adopted children compared to non-adopted children (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Braff, & Singer, 1984). Research shows that this disparity diminishes over time. Bohman and Sigvardsson (1980) reported that by the age of 15, the adopted children in their longitudinal research demonstrated similar levels of behavioural difficulties to their non-adopted peers. This finding has not always been replicated. Biehal et al. (2010) found that the children in their sample were still exhibiting difficulties 8 years after the initial research. The variance in these findings could be explained by differences in age at the time the follow-up data was gathered, as the children in Biehal et al.'s follow-up study were on average 2-3 years younger than the 15-year-olds in Bohman and Sigvardsson's study.

Adoptees may develop more behavioural issues as they get older, and especially around times of developmental transition such as starting school or moving between school phases (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990). This corresponds to evidence suggesting that adopted children are more likely to experience difficulties as they enter adolescence (Askeland et al., 2017). It makes sense that adoptive families can become especially vulnerable around times of developmental transition (Selwyn & Meakings, 2017; Waid & Alewine, 2018).

5.3 Educational outcomes

There is a lack of outcome data for adopted children as a cohort in the UK (Adoption UK, 2019a) because unlike looked-after children (LAC), their progress is not tracked regularly (Brown, Waters, & Shelton, 2017; Gore Langton & Boy, 2017). Brown et al. (2019, p. 49) describe this lack of monitoring as a "serious concern" given that most adopted children have similar backgrounds to LAC.

Available statistics suggest that at significant educational milestones adopted children perform better than LAC, but worse than non-care experienced children (Department for Education, 2018c). This is particularly evident at GCSE level, where only 22% of adopted children reach the threshold of five good GCSEs, compared to 53% of children who have never been in care (Department for Education, 2016b). Data from England (not collected in other nations) suggests that adopted children perform only half as well as their non-adopted peers in terms of examination outcomes (Adoption UK, 2019b). However, these statistics draw on cross-sectional data, which may conceal the nuances of individual progress and achievement.

81% of adopted parents in Adoption UK's (2019a) survey believed their child's early traumatic experiences have negatively impacted their emotional well-being at school, and 74% thought their child's academic progress was being affected. Similarly, almost half of the adoptive parents surveyed by Biehal et al. (2010) reported that their children were performing 'below' or 'well below' the expected level. While this self-reported information should be interpreted cautiously, it does reflect official statistics on the outcomes of adopted children.

Barratt (2011) noted that adopted children may avoid tasks that appear challenging due to a fear of failing. Their avoidance could be an attempt to prevent what Bombèr (2007) described as toxic shame. She suggested that children with a history of adversity often experience high levels of shame from past rejections. Any additional feelings of shame induced by making mistakes can push a vulnerable child from 'just-about-bearable' to 'toxic' levels of shame. However, caution must be taken around the notion of 'toxic' shame, as there is as yet no evidence-base to explain when shame become 'toxic', and what exactly that entails. Task avoidance could also be explained through the lens of a breakdown in The Learning Triangle (Geddes, 2006).

5.4   Long-term outcomes

Adoption UK (2019a) found that adopted 16-25 year olds were twice as likely as their peers to not be in education, employment or training. This agrees with Brown et al.'s (2019) finding that adopted children aged 10-15 had lower aspirations to continue with education after the age of 18, preferring instead to seek full-time employment. Brown et al. suggested this could be partly due to adoptees having less favourable experiences of education and proposed that further research is needed into this phenomenon.

5.5   Policy and provision for adopted children

This section sets out the policy and provision pertaining to adopted children in education.

5.5.1   *Children and Social Work Act 2017*

Several researchers have underscored the importance of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 in improving support for adopted children. Brown et al. (2019) noted that by widening the role of virtual school headteachers to include provision for adopted pupils, the Act prompted greater recognition of adopted children's needs. Stother, Woods and McIntosh (2019) highlighted that the Act recognises adopted children as a distinct group, separate to LAC.

5.5.2   Additional school funding for adopted children

Table 3 gives details of additional funding available to support adopted pupils.

Table 3 – details of additional funding for adopted pupils

Country	Programme name	Funding	Aims
England	Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)	£2,300 per year per LAC/adopted pupil, Reception – Year 11, paid directly to schools.	To support the educational, social and emotional needs of adopted children and LAC.
Wales	Pupil Development Grant (PDG)	Approx. £4 million per year across Wales, split between four local consortia according to need.	To support school improvement to reduce the inequalities facing LAC and adopted pupils.
Scotland	Pupil Equality Funding (PEF)	Varies by need. Not automatically allocated to adopted pupils, but head teachers can apply.	To close the poverty related attainment gap.
	Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund	£33 million across Scotland in 2019-2020.	To fund targeted initiative, activities and resources to improve the educational outcomes of care experienced pupils.
Northern Ireland	No additional funding for adopted pupils.		

5.5.3   The Adoption Support Fund

In 2015, the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) became available to adoptive families in England (via LAs) to enhance access to therapeutic support (Department for Education, 2019b). Support can be provided for adopted children, their parents, or the whole family.

5.5.4   Use of additional funding

Harlow (2019b) observed that schools use additional funding to support adopted pupils in many ways, including to fund EP work. Webber (2017) noted that Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinators (SENDCos, Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators or ALNCos in Wales) make important decisions about the use of

additional funds. The DfE stressed that best practice means including parents and pupils in decisions about how funds are spent (PAC-UK, 2018).

Welsh Government (2019) evaluated the implementation of the PDG and exemplified the following uses of the funding:

- interventions co-produced with CYP;
- strategic tools for monitoring and measuring outcomes;
- training to enhance staff understanding and awareness of pupils' needs;
- capacity building through training and support; and
- targeted support, such as individual and small group interventions.

However, the report also found variations in funding management at various systemic and local levels, which led to inconsistencies in the quality of work funded by the PDG. There were also concerns about a lack of communication or consultation with stakeholder organisations representing LAC, some of whom reported being unaware of how funding was spent.

King et al. (2019) reviewed the impact of the ASF. They noted that while statistics showed small improvements in the behaviour and mental well-being of children who received support through the ASF, it was impossible to establish a causal link. While the ASF has raised awareness about the needs of adoptive children, and has been associated with some positive short-term benefits, King et al. were wary about its long-term potential to make a significant difference. They noted that in a climate of shrinking public services, it is unrealistic to expect LAs to provide (or commission) the level of therapeutic support that the ASF aims to deliver.

5.5.5 *Parents' views on additional funding*

A quarter of parents surveyed by Adoption UK (2019a) had been told that their child's school could not afford to provide additional support. Many also felt that schools did not provide clear information about how they were spending the money which their child brought into the school, while 59% thought the funding was not being used properly.

Parents rate the ASF highly, with 84% of respondents saying their child had benefitted from the support received (Department for Education, 2018a). Families who received support via the ASF reported:

- benefits for behaviour and mental health;
- lower than predicted occurrence of psychiatric disorders and;
- a decrease in aggression.

Some parents were disappointed by how long it took for support through the ASF to begin. Some reported that the long wait resulted in an escalation of the issues they were facing at home (Department for Education, 2019b). Parents identified a need for greater integration between the ASF and educational settings. One parent suggested that ASF money could be used by schools to provide support while waiting for the outcome of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) applications (Department for Education, 2019b). Other parents thought that co-ordination between services (such as schools and CAMHS) was the priority, even more so than therapeutic support (King et al., 2019).

5.6 Summary

Adoption is an established practice in the UK and is considered the optimal outcome for children taken into care. Children benefit from adoption in many ways. Despite this, many adopted children continue to experience difficulties with SEN/ALN, social, emotional and behavioural needs, and mental health. Adopted children tend to have poorer educational outcomes and are less likely to pursue post-16 education. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 was a positive step towards the recognition and support of adopted children in England. Additional funding is available to schools in most parts of the UK, but some adoptive parents are concerned about how the funds are used. Support provided through the ASF has been associated with small benefits for adoptive families, but long waiting times have hampered its overall impact.

6   Adopted children in school

The previous sections established that many adopted children continue to face a range of challenges as they grow up. For any child, starting school can be a daunting experience, but for adopted children who are likely to have experienced early adversity, the journey through school can be exceptionally perilous. This section explores research relating to adopted children in school and how schools can support them.

6.1   Educational experiences of adopted children

Adopted pupils in our schools are a cohort fraught with complexity in terms of their backgrounds and needs. In view of this, adopted children may find the busy environment of school a bewildering or unsettling experience (Evans, 2018). Adoptive parents interviewed by Selwyn and Meakings (2017) said that starting school revealed new aspects of emotional vulnerability for their children, such as issues with confidence and self-esteem. However, it is important to recognise that not all adopted children struggle in school – many flourish socially and make excellent academic progress (Zill & Bradford Wilcox, 2018).

6.1.1   Transitions

All children experience transitions during their school career. However, for adopted children, starting school and moving between schools may be especially stressful (Gore Langton & Boy, 2017). Selwyn et al. (2014) interviewed a large sample of adoptive parents of whom a quarter voiced concerns that they had put their child into school too quickly, at the expense of forming a stronger bond with them at home.

Adoptive parents in Wales interviewed by Selwyn and Meakings (2017) identified the move from primary to secondary school as a difficult transition for their children. Challenges included:

- the larger setting;
- the more impersonal nature of the school;
- higher expectations of personal responsibility;

- moving between lessons; and

- being taught by supply teachers more frequently.

Gore Langton and Boy (2017) echoed these points. They observed that primary schools offer advantages for vulnerable pupils such as their smaller size, better communication with parents, and the ability to work flexibly to accommodate pupils' needs. Secondary schools may need to work even harder to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils.

Selwyn and Meakings (2017) reported a mixed picture of how well Welsh primary schools prepared adopted students for the transition to secondary school. Some parents reported positive accounts of well-planned transitions, but others felt that their requests to arrange enhanced transition were ignored by schools, leading to poorer outcomes for their children.

Transitions also occur throughout the day in school, such as going into school in the morning, going to assembly or going out for playtime. Bombèr (2007) advised allocating a 'key adult' to any child with attachment difficulties to help them manage both day-to-day and milestone transitions. Bombèr suggests that "the most significant time of the day for a key adult to be involved is first thing in the morning" (p.116), but also highlights how having a secure connection to one adult in school can help vulnerable children navigate transitions and changes in general.

6.1.2 _Academic pressure_

During the last decade, there has been an increased focus on academic attainment in schools (Adoption UK, 2019b). Some have argued that this has come at the expense of pupil well-being. Gore Langton and Boy (2017) described the pressure that headteachers are under to strike a balance between demonstrating school effectiveness through exam results and supporting pupil well-being.

The two need not be mutually exclusive. Rose et al. (2015) suggested that focusing on pupils' emotional well-being positively impacts other aspects of school life which may affect attainment. For example, improving well-being may reduce the incidence

of negative behaviour, leading to fewer time-out exclusions, thereby increasing time spent in lessons.

The new Ofsted inspection framework in England promised to redress the balance between attainment and well-being in schools. However, a report from Adoption UK (2019b) suggested that more action was needed to reduce the use of punitive behaviour management strategies. Adoption UK also highlighted the problem of 'off-rolling', which is when a pupil remains on a school's roll but spends most of their time at home or in alternative provisions.

6.1.3   *Adoption-related teasing*

According to Wyman Battalen, Dow-Fleisner and Brodzinsky (2020) 21% of adoptive parents responding to the Modern Adoptive Families study in the USA reported that their child had been teased because they were adopted. Other research from Wales found similar evidence (Selwyn & Meakings, 2017). Adoptees in England report even higher rates of adoption-related teasing (Neil, 2012). Soares et al. (2019) found evidence that Portuguese adoptees experienced a loss of status as a result of other people's opinions on adoption. When recognised and commented on by peers, their feelings of difference were accentuated.

6.1.4   *Exclusion*

Data gathered by Adoption UK (2019a) suggested that adopted pupils were 20 times more likely than their non-adopted peers to be permanently excluded during 2018. The data also revealed that 29% of respondents' children had received internal exclusions during 2018, 10% received short-term exclusions and 12% experienced illegal informal exclusions (when a pupil is asked to leave school, but the exclusion is not recorded).

Evidence suggests that exclusion negatively affects the well-being of the pupil's family (Parker, Paget, Ford, & Gwernan-Jones, 2016) both through the message sent to the family about their parenting abilities, and the practical impact of arranging alternative childcare. Another report (Centre for Mental Health, 2020) noted that

pupils with a history of trauma are especially vulnerable to psychological harm from exclusion, which may lead to a vicious cycle of more challenging behaviour leading to further exclusion. Ford et al. (2018) reported similar findings in terms of the circular causality of exclusion and poor mental health.

Issuing guidance to schools in England on mental health, the DfE (Department for Education, 2018b) advised that when considering exclusion, schools should take into account the mental health needs of the pupil. Additional legislation and statutory guidance should be applied when considering excluding LAC. However, there is no mention of formerly-looked-after children in this caveat. Interestingly, the DfE advises schools to "balance the interests of the pupil against the mental and physical health of the whole school." While schools obviously need to consider the welfare of all pupils, it seems problematic to suggest sacrificing the stability and education of one pupil for the greater good.

6.2   Support for adopted children in the UK education system

While section 5.5 described the funding available to support adopted children in the UK, this section looks more closely at the specific approaches taken by schools.

Stother et al. (2019) conducted a robust systematic review of post-adoption support in educational settings using the PRISMA process (Moher et al., 2009). They found that until recently, schools have not had "clear guidance on how to systematically identify, monitor and meet the needs of [adopted] children." (p.432). The lack of statutory guidance for schools about adopted pupils is also highlighted by Stewart (2017). Stother et al. identified four critical aspects to the post-adoption support provided by educational settings: strategies for support (which included training and post-adoption support groups); shared understanding; communication; and monitoring.

Estyn (2020) identified that pupils who have experienced early adversity might experience social difficulties at school. They noted that when schools provide

targeted social interventions such as nurture groups, there are benefits not just for their social and emotional function, but also for their academic progress.

Earlier sections of this review established that most adopted children have similar backgrounds to children who remain in care and are likely to continue to experience the same kind of difficulties as LAC. This understanding is difficult to reconcile with the fact that for many years, much of the educational support provided for LAC ceased once a child was adopted (Golding, 2010). The enhanced provision introduced by The Children and Social Work Act 2017 in England was an attempt to remedy this discrepancy. However, these changes have not necessarily improved the situation for all adoptive families. Only 59% of parents knew who the designated teacher for LAC at their child's school was, and only 57% were aware of the extension of virtual school provision (Adoption UK, 2019a).

While support for adopted pupils in schools is available, adoptive families report that accessing support is a frustrating and challenging process (Selwyn et al., 2014). 70% of adoptive parents in a large, nationally representative sample reported that they struggle to get support for their child (Adoption UK, 2019a). The lengthy timescales involved in requesting, negotiating and then implementing support can leave adoptive parents feeling that when they eventually receive help, it is too late to be effective (Sturgess & Selwyn, 2007). LAs are legally obliged to conduct an assessment of adopted children's needs, although they are not required to offer provision (Harlow, 2019b). However, evidence from Wales suggests that many adoptive parents are not aware of this fact (Bell & Kempenaar, 2010).

Harlow (2019b, p. 273) suggests that the current stance in society is one of post-dependency, in which "individuals are expected to remain independent as far as possible". She recognised that this does not work in favour of adoptive parents who are desperate for support and cannot provide it themselves.

6.3   Support from other professionals

Schools sometimes call on other professionals such as CAMHS, social workers and EPs for advice on how to support adoptive pupils. King (2009) found that schools value support from EPs, as it enables them to provide better support for adopted pupils. However, research suggests that schools prioritise LAC over adopted pupils when planning EP involvement, as evidenced by Osborne et al.'s (2009) finding that EPs spend almost twice as much time with LAC as adopted children. Selwyn and Meakings (2017) found that adoptive parents have had varied experiences with EPs. Some were pleased with the advice that EPs gave to schools, but others expressed concern that some EPs did not have enough knowledge of adoption-related issues such as attachment and trauma. Wiley (2017) points out that psychologists are seldom trained in specific matters relating to adoption and highlights this as a concern for parents, who rated very few of the psychologists they and their children encountered as 'adoption-competent'.

In 2016, the DfE projected that by 2020, all adoptive families would have access to timely, appropriate support from local specialist teams such as CAMHS and social work teams (Department for Education, 2016a). However, Gore Langton (2017) cast doubt on whether that was achievable, noting that parents often find the systems for accessing support confusing and unapproachable. Selwyn and Meakings (2017) reported that parents often find themselves stuck in the middle of several service providers, each denying responsibility for providing support. Harlow (2019b, p. 274) described families being "ricocheted around the system in search of help". Harlow also expressed adoptive parents' disappointment with the apparent lack of educational support for their children. Stother et al. (2019) suggested that for post-adoption support to be meaningful, it needs to involve professionals from multiple disciplines working in synchronicity and learning from each other, but this appears to be complicated in practice.

A further source of confusion for adoptive parents is who they should approach for support (Selwyn & Meakings, 2017). The LA which placed the child is responsible for support for three years post-adoption, at which point it switches to the child's new

home LA (Harlow, 2019b). Selwyn and Meakings reported that some adoptive parents in Wales, frustrated with inaccessible services, have paid privately for assessments and support for their children.

6.4   Teachers' understanding of adoption

To support adopted pupils, school staff first need to recognise that adopted children have needs, and also need to understand the continuing impact of their early experiences. Research evidence presented in the following sections suggests that this is not currently the case in many UK schools.

6.4.1   *Perceptions and misconceptions about adoption*

93% of Weistra and Luke's (2017) participants (adoptive parents in the UK) agreed with the statement, 'people in society do not understand adoptive families'. Teachers working with adopted children may be unaware of how their own inherent beliefs and values affect their practice, and may also have outdated understandings of adoption (Sempowicz, Howard, Tambyah, & Carrington, 2018). A misconception persists among the general public that adoptees were voluntarily relinquished by their birth families or were adopted because they had been orphaned (BAAF, 2010, cited in Gore Langton, 2017). Consequently Syne et al. (2012) made the case that many people, including school staff, may not be aware that adopted children are likely to have faced early adversity, and will continue to face similar challenges to LAC (Phillips, 2007). Even if they are aware of the factors contributing to children going into care, many people view of adoption as a 'happy ending' for children (Syne et al., 2012; Thomas, 2015) which somehow eradicates the impact of previous experiences (Gore Langton, 2017).

6.4.2   *Knowledge and understanding of adoption issues*

Most parents make schools aware of their child's adopted status (Wyman Battalen et al., 2020). Despite this, school staff may not view adopted children as vulnerable and therefore, may not identify them as needing support in school (Golding, 2010). For example, King (2009) interviewed teachers about their perceptions of adopted pupils. Secondary teachers believed that adopted children were unlikely to have

SEN/ALN and were mostly unaware of the possible impact of ACEs/trauma on adopted pupils. Stewart (2017) reported that the primary school teachers she interviewed had a general awareness that some adopted pupils experienced social, emotional and behavioural issues. However, they did not link these issues to academic attainment and were less likely to believe that adopted children required additional support in school. They also viewed adopted children as less vulnerable than LAC and constructed adopted children's needs differently.

Teachers' evaluations of adopted children may be influenced by their knowledge and understanding of adoption (Dalen & Theie, 2019). Media portrayals of adoptees (Creedy, 2000; Maxwell & Cook, 2014), and research literature, which tends to focus on difficulties and deficits (Van Ijzendoorn, Juffer, & Poelhuis, 2005) may also contribute to teachers' perceptions of adoptees. Gajda (2004), herself an adoptive parent, urged teachers to revisit their preconceived notions of adopted children.

Data gathered from teachers suggests they often feel unprepared to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils (Darmody, McMahon, Banks, & Gilligan, 2013; Sebba et al., 2015). Similarly, Evans (2018) describes how professionals (in this case health visitors) can be unprepared to address the challenges faced by adoptive families, usually due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of adoption-related issues. Wyman Battalen et al. (2020) pointed out that while there has been an increase in training in adoption-related matters among health and social work professionals in the USA, the same is not true for education professionals, who are also in the position to make a difference. Fancourt (2019) notes that teachers are increasingly required to apply research findings (such as those on attachment) in their practice, but that doing so can be disconcerting. School staff would benefit from support from intermediaries who can explain concepts from research findings. It could be argued that EPs are well-placed to fulfil this role.

6.4.3 Sensitivity around adoption

Sempowicz et al. (2018) presented evidence that some classroom topics and activities may cause distress for adopted children and their families. Examples include family trees, autobiographies, and celebrations such as Mother's/Father's Day. Most parents reported that they did not object to these activities but would prefer to be spoken to in advance so that they could prepare and support their child. Sempowicz et al. also highlighted the need for sensitivity when sharing books and stories in school, as some of the content may remind adopted children of traumatic elements of their past or cause emotional responses around the different presentations of 'family' as a concept. Goldberg, Frost and Black (2017) and King (2009) reported very similar findings, suggesting that schools sometimes fail to anticipate how some aspects of the curriculum may affect vulnerable pupils.

However, even when school staff are aware that some topics may be challenging for adopted children, they may not always be sensitive in their handling of the situation. One adopted pupil interviewed by Selwyn et al. (2014) recalled their experience of being told to leave a lesson about child abuse and foster care because it was "sensitive" and described the ensuing teasing from their classmates who were previously unaware that they were adopted.

6.4.4 Staff training

Previous sections of this review presented evidence that schools can offer opportunities for trauma-experienced children to develop positive, nurturing relationships. It is also clear that for children to be successful learners, they need to feel safe, secure and contained (Geddes, 2006). This creates a strong argument for explicitly training school staff about the impact of early adversity, so that they can provide the right kind of support for all pupils, but especially those who are more vulnerable. Fancourt (2019) suggested that knowledge of attachment theory is outside the realm of expertise of many school staff, but appropriate training could resolve this. He also predicted that teachers are likely to respond well to attachment-awareness training, as they will be able to see the relevance to the events that unfold in their classrooms every day.

In Scotland, ACE-awareness and learning to recognise when pupils may be in distress has become a core part of teaching standards. In Wales, the new curriculum emphasises the importance of relationships for helping children feel safe at school. There have been some steps in this direction in England. For example, Sheffield Hallam University's initial teacher training course has partnered with Trauma Informed Schools UK to ensure that new teachers understand the importance of supporting pupil well-being.

Estyn (2020) reported that in Wales, many school staff (especially support assistants) have received training around supporting pupils with ACEs and that this has improved their understanding of the impact of trauma and the importance of attachment. They noted that whole-school training is less likely to have occurred in secondary schools than in primaries. However, training on other topics is less commonplace. Adoption UK (2019b) found that only half of UK teachers have received training around supporting care-experienced children. Concerningly, only 22% of designated teachers for LAC/previously-looked-after children (England only) had received additional time or funding to help with their role.

Fancourt (2019) reported on an evaluation of attachment-awareness training delivered to school staff in one LA. He found that the teachers involved valued learning about the theoretical underpinnings of attachment and felt confident that they could apply what they learned in their classrooms, and as part of a broader organisational approach. Fancourt also interviewed pupils in the schools involved and discovered that they were well-versed in the ways that school staff supported pupils with attachment needs. While Fancourt noted that it is impossible to attribute these findings directly to the impact of the training, it appears that both pupils and staff noticed changes in the way the schools handled attachment needs.

Similarly, Dingwall and Sebba (2018) found that receiving attachment awareness training helped school staff to become more open and understanding of behaviour resulting from attachment needs, which could be observed in their use of language

with pupils. Dingwall and Sebba also observed that more-experienced teachers might struggle to adjust their perceptions of children presenting with disruptive behaviour, despite receiving more information about trauma and attachments.

In keeping with implementation science, Webber's (2017) case study of one school attempting to adopt a whole-school approach highlighted that one-off training is unlikely to have a lasting impact. There was also recognition among school staff interviewed by Dingwall and Sebba (2018) that attachment awareness training needed to reach all members of the school community (such as catering and janitorial staff), not just those based in the classroom.

6.5   Summary

Many adopted children face challenges along their journey through school. These include transitions; pressure to perform well academically; teasing; and exclusion. While in the past schools have not received clear guidance on how to support adopted pupils, the introduction of The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and increased training on attachment, trauma and ACEs are all positive steps. However, research has identified a need to address misconceptions about adoption among school staff. It is also vital that schools consider whether specific topics/activities may cause adopted pupils distress or make them feel uncomfortable.

7   Adoptive parents' experiences with schools

For any parent, making decisions about their child's education is a key aspect of their parental role. As previous sections have shown, many adoptive families face a different set of challenges, which have the potential to complicate their children's educational path. This section explores research relating to the experiences of adoptive parents, beginning with general issues but then moving onto educational matters to find out more about the barriers and facilitating factors that exist in the interactions between adoptive parents and schools.

7.1   Impact on adoptive parents

Adoption is a positive experience for many parents (Evans, 2018) and 88% of adoptive parents are glad that they adopted (BBC/Adoption UK, 2017). However, parenting an adopted child can be extremely challenging and has an enormous impact on family life (Selwyn & Meakings, 2017; Selwyn et al., 2014). Adoptive parents need to provide something more than 'good enough' parenting (Syne et al., 2012) while demonstrating resilience towards their child's repeated rejection (Walker, 2008). The DfE (2019b) reported that among families who accessed the ASF, the wellbeing and mental health of parents was significantly lower than the general population. Weistra and Luke (2017) suggested that compared to foster carers, adoptive parents may be judged more harshly on their children's behaviour, due to a lack of understanding about the long-term impact of pre-adoption adversity. Waid and Alewine (2018) suggested that some parents may view their adopted child's challenges as a reflection of their parenting abilities. Adoptive parents in Weistra and Luke's research reported that they felt pressure to be perfect parents, due to the stigma around their choice to adopt.

Adoptive parents frequently turn to other adopters as a source of information, support or reassurance. All the parents in Weistra and Luke's (2017) study had attended an adoption support group at some point. They may feel that other adopters can relate to the unique challenges of parenting an adopted child. Parents also expressed concern that their non-adopting friends and families expected their

child to rebound from early adversity following adoption, further evidencing a lack of understanding of pre-adoption adversity (Weistra & Luke, 2017).

Unfortunately, evidence suggests that educational issues can add to the strain on adoptive parents. Weistra and Luke (2017) indicated that adoptive parents in the UK often need a greater understanding of child development issues than most parents to support their child. Adoptive parents need to explain their child's background to schools, to help schools understand their child's behaviour and needs, and to avoid school staff forming a negative impression of their child (Goldberg et al., 2017). Many parents take the initiative in educating schools about adoption-related issues (Selwyn & Meakings, 2017). This has mixed results, sometimes resulting in better support and understanding, but sometimes causing staff to feel out of their depth and unable to provide adequate support. In some cases, parents' offers to share knowledge were not taken up (Selwyn & Meakings, 2017).

Goldberg et al. (2017) emphasised the significance of school staff being willing to listen to adoptive parents and show an interest in their child's background and needs. As Goldberg et al. (2017, p. 199) described:

> "…this meant the world to them; rather than feeling left alone to advocate for their child amid an unfamiliar and challenging set of circumstances, they felt that they were part of a team who cared."

7.2   Choosing a school

Adoptive parents must consider multiple factors when selecting a school, such as support for SEN/ALN and inclusion, as well as practical considerations such as distance from home (Goldberg et al., 2017). Gore Langton and Boy (2017) note that adoptive parents must discriminate between schools which are genuinely prepared to learn and adapt to support their children, and those who may make grand promises about inclusion, but then fail to deliver. Statistics suggest that 69% of adopters are first-time parents (Dance, 2015), so are unlikely to be familiar with the challenging task of school selection.

7.3   Parent's experiences of support from educational settings

There is a small pool of research seeking to understand the support provided to adopted children from their parent's point of view. Adoption UK (2019a) surveyed 3500 adoptive parents in the UK. A majority named education as their family's top challenge. 80% felt their child required more support in school than non-adopted pupils. Positively, 71% of respondents said that school staff listened to them and valued their knowledge and expertise. However, the average score given to schools for 'Training and expertise of staff members in attachment, trauma and other issues related to adopted children' was only 2.6 out of 5 (Adoption UK, 2019a). King et al. (2019) also reported a mixed picture of the support adoptive parents received. While some parents noted positive and supportive experiences with schools, others said that schools lacked awareness of their child's needs, sometimes prompting a move to a different school.

In Harlow's (2019b) research, some parents felt that schools were reluctant to communicate about their child's difficulties. Parents were frustrated when schools did not consider the impact of their children's early experiences on their educational progress. Harlow also interviewed school staff and found that, while sympathetic to the struggles faced by adoptive children and their families, they did not always know how to help.

In the USA, Goldberg et al. (2017) reported that one-third of the adoptive parents they interviewed felt that the school district was not meeting their child's needs. Parents talked of frustration around accessing assessments for their child, and a lack of consistency in the implementation of support. Some parents in Wales reported that their LA was known to avoid carrying out assessments of need (Selwyn & Meakings, 2017). While acknowledging how frustrating the constant battling can be for parents, Goldberg et al. also suggested that parent advocacy is crucial for adopted children to succeed in school.

Wyman Battalen et al. (2020) found that adoptive parents sometimes do not know how to approach schools for help and are reluctant to do so due to previous negative

experiences. Similarly, Harlow (2019b) interviewed adoptive parents and found that they were not always sure who to approach for support, because they found it challenging to pinpoint what sort of help they needed. Even when they are clear who to ask, and what to ask for, adoptive parents do not always find the support they are seeking. For example, Groze (1996) surveyed adoptive parents and found that they were frustrated by a lack of 'adoption-sensitive' services, in other words, services which understand the unique needs of adoptive families. Parents reported that services viewed their families as dysfunctional, which led to feelings of guilt and blame for the parents, even those who typically considered themselves to be competent.

Several parents involved in Goldberg et al.'s (2017) research highlighted the importance of structure for their children, a factor also emphasised by Bombèr (2007). They noticed that when their children were given too much free choice at school, they were more likely to become distressed or act out. One parent pointed out that some teachers are better at acknowledging this than others, explaining that her son's previous teacher, "didn't have that kind of mindset" (Goldberg et al., 2017, p. 196). In contrast, his current teacher had noticed and tried hard to maintain structure and predictability. This anecdote highlights how individual members of staff and their differing approaches can have a considerable impact.

7.4 Home education

Four per cent of the adoptive parents in Adoption UK's (2019a) research reported that they had home-educated for at least some of 2018. Of these, only 8% had chosen to do so. 92% felt they had been forced into home educating due to issues at school. 12% were home-educating because their child was permanently excluded from school. Most home-educating families reported beneficial outcomes for their child's well-being. However, 35% noted that the financial pressures involved, coupled with a lack of support from their LA, meant that the consequences of home education overshadowed the benefits. Adoptive parents in England who home-educate are not eligible for PP+ funding (PAC-UK, 2018), exacerbating the financial strain of one or more parent leaving work. Adoption UK (2019a) found that 80% of

adoptive families who were home educating would prefer that their child was in school if they could find a suitable setting.

7.5 Summary

While many parents have negative experiences concerning their children's education, evidence suggests that adoptive parents face even greater challenges than most parents. Research has highlighted choosing schools, getting the right support, and helping staff to understand adoption-related issues as some of the supplementary barriers. Adoptive parents may face stigma and misunderstandings about their family. Some adoptive families educate their children at home, and this creates additional pressures for the family.

8   The current study

This narrative literature review began by examining attachment theory, including some contemporary perspectives. This was followed by a focus on trauma and ACEs, which highlighted the impact of early adversity on long-term developmental outcomes. Next, consideration was given to attachment, trauma and ACEs in the school context, with the recognition that unless schools support vulnerable pupils in these areas, they will struggle to be successful learners. Evidence was presented in support of whole-school approaches to attachment- and trauma-awareness. Subsequently, the concept of adoption was explored alongside some of the benefits and challenges experienced by adoptive families, and an overview of policy and provision. The final two sections looked at the experiences of adopted children in school, and then at research about adoptive parents and education. Both of these latter sections emphasised aspects of the educational journey that adoptive families experience as challenging, including transitions; academic pressure; adoption-related teasing/bullying; exclusion; misconceptions and insensitivity about adoption; lack of staff training; and lack of appropriate support in school. The impact of negative experiences with schools on adoptive parents was also discussed, including when families educate their children at home.

8.1   Rationale for current study

This backdrop of significant challenge affirms the need to understand the experiences of adoptive parents concerning their children's education, in the hope that greater understanding can lead to improved practice and reduced negative impact on families.

We must care about what school is like for adopted children (Soares, Barbosa-Ducharne, Palacios, & Fonseca, 2017). This literature review presented evidence that adopted children do not always have a smooth journey through school, which has implications for their families. Adoptive parents are critical stakeholders in their children's educational experiences and are in a strong position to provide insight into this phenomenon. Parental input is now recognised as central to planning and

improving provision for children with SEN/ALN, as parents are rightly viewed as experts on their children.

While adoption is a much-researched phenomenon (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010), there has been relatively little investigation of the intersection between adoptive parents and schools (Goldberg & Smith, 2014). One example is Goldberg et al. (2017) who interviewed adoptive parents in the USA about their school selection process, but also looked at parents' experiences once their child started school.

The present study is guided by bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which recognises the influence of multiple systems on framing identity and development. Bronfenbrenner suggested that parts of the microsystem (such as families) interact with the exosystem (such as schools) within the mesosystem. Through their interactions, each influences the other. Educational experiences are linked inextricably to the life courses and development of adoptive families. Therefore, it is considered pertinent to explore the experiences of adoptive parents in the UK concerning their children's education.

8.2 Relevance to educational psychologists

EPs are well-placed to support adopted children and their families (Gore Langton, 2017; Osborne & Alfano, 2011; Osborne et al., 2009) due to their knowledge of behaviour, learning and attachment. Cooper and Johnson's (2007) research suggested that adoptive parents are keen for school staff to have a greater understanding of adoption issues (such as attachment needs), and Syne et al. (2012) suggeste that EPs are in a strong position to facilitate this.

Research from the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (2006) found that most EPs work with adopted children and their families. The report noted that in some areas, EPs have taken up roles within fostering and adoption teams alongside social workers. Research suggests that 25-50% of adopted children receive EP input (Sturgess & Selwyn, 2007).

EPs can empower adoptive parents and ensure their views are heard through consultation. This process will be significantly enhanced if EPs understand the experiences that adoptive parents have when working with schools. Therefore, it is suggested that the outcomes of this research will be highly relevant to EPs and help them to be better informed about some of the facilitators and barriers that adopted parents encounter when working with schools. By identifying positive and negative examples of adoption-related practice in schools, EPs will be able to promote more of the positive.

8.3   Research aims

The present study aimed to give a voice to adoptive parents in the UK by allowing them to speak out about their experiences with schools. The researcher took an interpretative phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis. Commonalities between accounts were synthesised into themes, to generate an overall picture of adoptive parents' experiences. These reflect some of the barriers and facilitators that they have encountered in their interactions with schools. The research question that the current study aimed to answer was: What experiences have adoptive parents had with schools, and how do they make sense of those experiences?

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The experiences of adoptive parents with their children's education: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

Part Two: Major Empirical Study

Word count: 6993

Part Two: Major Empirical Study

Abstract

Research suggests that adopted children often experience challenges in school, including cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, usually due to adverse pre-adoption experiences. Other research suggests that schools sometimes hold misconceptions about the needs of adopted pupils. Parents play a mediating role in their children's education through their interactions with schools, so this study sought to investigate the lived experiences of adopted parents concerning their children's education.

The study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis framework. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six adoptive mothers. All had at least one adopted child of primary school age, who had attended a school in the UK for at least one term following their adoption.

The transcripts were notated, analysed and interpreted using the steps suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). Five participants reported overwhelmingly negative experiences with schools, while one participant reported a more positive experience. Six superordinate themes were identified: 'Every school is different'; 'Transitions'; 'Parents taking action'; 'Learning'; 'The power of people'; and 'IMPACT!'. Each of these contained several subordinate themes.

Several conclusions were drawn from the data. First, the variety of experiences reported suggests that schools across England and Wales vary in their recognition and support of adopted children. Second, most participants in this study felt ignored by schools and needed to fight to have their children's needs met. Third, it became clear how strongly individuals within schools can alter the educational experiences of adoptive families, both positively and negatively. Finally, a clear message from all participants was the impact that their children's school experiences had on life at home, and vice versa. The main implication was that schools need greater support to recognise, understand and meet the needs of adopted children. Educational psychologists are in a strong position to facilitate this.

1   Introduction

Adopted children are a small but vulnerable group in UK schools (Gore Langton & Boy, 2017). Three thousand five hundred and seventy children were adopted from care in England in the year ending 31st March 2019 (Department for Education, 2019a). A further 309 were adopted from care in Wales (CoramBAAF, 2020). The most recent statistics available for Scotland and Northern Ireland gave their yearly adoption figures as 321 and 84, respectively (CoramBAAF, 2020).

In many ways, adoption is a positive milestone in a child's life. Most children entering the care system have experienced trauma, neglect and abuse (Adoption UK, 2019a; Hornfleck, 2019; Selwyn & Meakings, 2017; Zill & Bradford Wilcox, 2018). Once they enter care, most children experience multiple moves between foster carers (Selwyn, Wijedasa, & Meakings, 2014), which means continued attachment disruption and instability. Adoption is a source of much-needed stability for care-experienced children and is the best possible outcome for children in care (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; King, Gieve, Iacopini, Hahne, & Stradling, 2019).

Being adopted provides many benefits to children, including:
- a safe home in a supportive community;
- access to good schooling;
- love and emotional support; and
- an aspirational approach to intellectual development (Zill & Bradford Wilcox, 2018).

Adoptive parents report high levels of satisfaction in their decision to adopt (BBC/Adoption UK, 2017) and adoption can be a positive and transforming experience for both parent and child (Evans, 2018).

Despite the advantages offered by adoption, a wealth of evidence suggests that adopted children continue to be vulnerable post-adoption. Adopted children appear to be at higher risk of:

- having special educational needs (SEN)/additional learning needs (ALN) (Department for Education, 2018b);

- social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Biehal, Ellison, Sinclair, & Baker, 2010);

- mental health difficulties (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010); and

- poor educational outcomes (Department for Education, 2018b).

Adopted children are more likely to be excluded from school (Adoption UK, 2019a), which can contribute to a vicious circle of rejection (Centre for Mental Health, 2020). Exclusion also has broader consequences for their families (such as feelings of blame financial implications). There may also be long-term consequences, evidenced by statistics showing that adopted children are less likely to pursue post-secondary education (Brown, Waters, & Shelton, 2019).

The continued difficulties experienced by adopted children can be explained through the dual lenses of attachment and trauma. Attachment theory posits that a child's earliest experiences with their caregivers are crucial in forming the blueprint on which they will base their future relationships (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1970). Most children receive 'good enough' parenting through which their basic needs for food, shelter, love and affection are met. These children usually become securely attached to their caregiver and carry forward the propensity to form other secure attachments. However, some children do not have positive early experiences. Ainsworth et al. hypothesised that children who experienced inconsistent, neglectful or harmful early relationships would develop one of two types of insecure attachment (avoidant or ambivalent). A third type of insecure attachment, disorganised, was later added by Main and Solomon (1986).

The work of Bowlby and Ainsworth remains influential in both education and social care practice (Harlow, 2019a). However, it has been argued that assigning children into categories is inflexible and pathologising (Smith, Cameron, & Reimer, 2017), and fails to capture individual differences in attachment style and strength. Developments in attachment theory, such as the Dynamic-Maturational Model

(DMM) (Crittenden, Landini, & Claussen, 2001) reflect a more positive and adaptive view of attachment. The DMM refutes the hypothesis that once a child leaves a 'critical period' during their early years, their attachment style cannot be changed.

Children adopted from care are likely to have been exposed to trauma (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2013). Experience of trauma is linked to chronic stress and disrupted neurobiological development (Bellis et al., 2015). For adoptees, this is related to increased prevalence of special educational needs (SEN)/additional learning needs (ALN) (Department for Education, 2018a); neurodevelopmental disorders (Adoption UK, 2019a); mental health issues (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010); and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Brown, Waters, & Shelton, 2017). Trauma-experienced children demonstrate problems with executive functioning (Bombèr, 2007) and emotional regulation (Bombèr, 2011) among other things.

Adoptive families already face enormous challenges, above and beyond those faced by non-adoptive families. Sadly, the existing research contains many examples of schools failing to support adoptive families, compounding the challenges they face. Research suggests that schools and teachers are often ill-equipped to meet the needs of adopted children, with identified barriers including:

- misconceptions about adoption and adopted children (Syne, Green, & Dyer, 2012);
- a lack of knowledge and awareness of adoption-related issues (Sebba et al., 2015);
- a lack of knowledge and understanding of the impact of early adversity (Fancourt, 2019); and
- a lack of sensitivity in terms of curriculum topics relating to families (Sempowicz, Howard, Tambyah, & Carrington, 2018).

Schools could overcome some of these barriers by adopting a whole-school trauma-informed approach (Estyn, 2020; Webber, 2017). However, this requires significant

training, reframing and adaptation, and more research is needed into the impact of taking this type of approach (Maynard, Farina, Dell, & Kelly, 2019).

Educational psychologists (EPs) work with adopted children and their families in the school context (Osborne, Norgate, & Traill, 2009). They are therefore in a strong position to advocate for their needs, and act as a bridge between schools and adoptive families, especially in cases where communication has broken down. But EPs will only be able to facilitate this relationship if they have a clear picture of the barriers that adoptive parents experience when interacting with schools.

1.1 The current study

There is a wealth of research on adoption (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010). While much of this focuses on adoptees' educational experiences (Gore Langton, 2017), very little has addressed educational issues from the perspective of adoptive parents (Goldberg, 2014). The only recent research investigating adoptive parents' views of education (Goldberg, Frost, & Black, 2017) was conducted in the USA and focused primarily on how adoptive parents went about selecting a school. Therefore, there is a paucity of up-to-date research on UK adoptive parents and their views on education.

There are subtle differences between the four UK nations in terms of their adoption and education systems. Due to the geographic locations of the participants recruited, this research only represents the views of parents in England and Wales. However, it is expected that many of the implications of this research will apply to the broader UK context, as there are some experiences that most adopted families will share, regardless of where they live.

1.2 Research question

This study explored the following research question: What experiences have adoptive parents had with schools, and how do they make sense of those experiences?

2   Methodology

2.1   Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework which guided this study is shown in Figure 5.
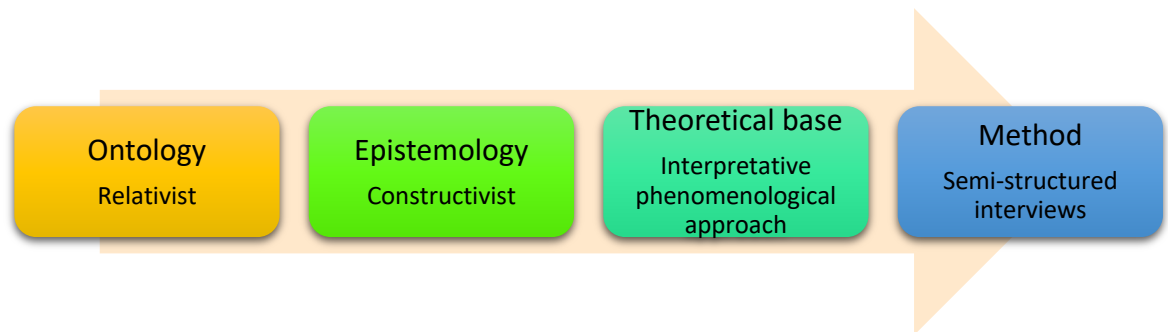
Figure 5 – Theoretical framework of current study

2.2   Ontology and epistemology

The current study was rooted in the belief that multiple, equally valid constructions of reality exist. Therefore, a relativist ontological stance was taken which aligns with the assumption that it is possible and legitimate to research an individual's experiences and perceptions (Willig, 2008). This research examined the personal realities of adoptive parents.

The epistemological stance was constructivism, the belief that learning involves individuals actively constructing knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013). 'Knowledge' was taken as subjective, and the participants involved in this study shared their interpretations of their experiences.

2.3   Methodological approach

This study followed the principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), complementing the ontological and epistemological stances described above. IPA is better viewed as an approach rather than a method, as it guides all aspects of research design, not just analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It entails the in-depth exploration of how participants experience a phenomenon and how they make sense of it (Smith, 2004; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is an idiographic approach,

which means that it drills down into how a homogenous group of participants have interpreted the same phenomenon. IPA was therefore considered an appropriate approach for finding out more about what experiences adoptive parents have had with schools, and how they make sense of them. It was selected over other qualitative methods (such as thematic analysis) due to its interpretative nature, which goes beyond just describing an experience. IPA allows both participant and researcher to uncover what that experience meant contemporaneously, and how it has continued to impact their lives.

2.4 Procedure

The entire research procedure is detailed in Figure 6.

Gatekeeper consent

Ethical approval was granted in April 2019. A gatekeeper email was sent to two charities (Adoption UK and PAC-UK) in April 2019 (see Appendix D). Adoption UK agreed to circulate information about the study to their members. PAC-UK refused on the grounds that they had too many members to circulate to everyone.

Advertisement of study

Information about the study went live online in April 2019. The researcher created a recruitment poster (see Appendix E) which was posted on Adoption UK's website, Twitter feed, in their newsletter, and on their forums.

Contact with participants

Nine email responses were received from people expressing interest in participating. Three of them did not meet the inclusion criteria as their children were too old. The remaining six were sent the participant information sheet (see Appendix F). Once they confirmed that they were happy to participate, interviews were arranged.

Interviews

Three interviews were conducted in June 2019, one in July 2019 and the final two took place in August 2019. Before beginning the interview, participants were given another chance to read the participant information sheet, and were asked to indicate their consent to take part by completing and signing a consent form (see Appendix G). The semi-structured interviews took place in person, and were loosely guided by a prepared schedule (see Appendix H). The interviews lasted between 55 and 90 minutes. Following each interview, participants were given a debrief form (see Appendix I).

Figure 6 – Recruitment and data collection procedures

2.5   Sampling

As an idiographic approach, IPA works best when used with a small group of participants who have had a similar experience (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, a purposive approach was taken to sampling. This reduced the generalisability of the data (Robson & McCartan, 2016), but created a relatively homogeneous sample (Smith & Osborn, 2015). See Table 4 for participant inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Table 4 – Participant inclusion/exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
• Participants will be the legal adoptive parent of a child who is currently of primary school age in the UK (4-11 years old). • Participants will have adopted their child from foster care or residential care in the United Kingdom. • Participants will have finalised the adoption of their child at least one year ago. • Participants will have an adopted child who attended school for at least one full academic year following adoption. • Participants will have made their adopted child's school aware of their child's adopted status. • Participant's adoptive children will be aware of their own adopted status.	• Their adopted child is younger or older than primary school age. • Their adopted child has not attended school for at least one term following being adopted. • Their child was adopted from a country other than the United Kingdom. • Their child was adopted from birth (i.e. did not spend time in foster/residential care). • The adoption has broken down (i.e. the adopted child no longer lives with them).

2.6 Recruitment

Figure 6 explains the recruitment process. Six participants were recruited, see Table 5 for demographics. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their anonymity.

Table 5 – Participant demographics

#	Pseudonym	Location	Child/ren discussed in interview (age at time of adoption)	Child's school year at time of interview	Disclosed SEN/ALN
1	Donna	England	Son (2 years 3 months)	Year 3	Motor difficulties affecting handwriting Attachment issues ASD/ADHD under investigation
2	Mary	England	Son A (1 year) Son B (1 year)	Year 2 Year 1 (both home educated)	
3	Susan	Wales	Daughter A (6 months) Daughter B (2 years)	Year 3 Year 1	ADHD Sensory processing disorder FASD MLD
4	Karen	Wales	Son (3 years 11 months)	Year 5	Attachment disorder FASD
5	Linda	England	Son (16 months)	In between Year 4 and 5*	
6	Sharon	England	Son A (non-adopted) Son B (20 months)	In between Year 7 and 8* In between Year 4 and 5*	ASD

*interviewed in summer holidays

2.7   Conducting the interviews

The researcher met with participants in their homes, workplaces, or public meeting rooms. The interviews did not follow a prescribed structure, but generally started with questions about their family, then moved onto their experiences with schools. The researcher prepared a list of topics to ask about (see Appendix H) but tended to follow natural lines of enquiry as the interview progressed.   A digital recorder was used to capture the interviews. The researcher transcribed each interview then deleted the recordings.

2.8   Pilot interview

The first interview served as a pilot. Immediately following the interview, the participant was asked for feedback about their experience of the interview, which the researcher used to improve her technique. The researcher reflected on which topics would have benefitted from greater/lesser focus, and how to increase the amount of interpretation and reflection on the part of the participant. Changes were made to the interview schedule to reflect this.

2.9   Data analysis

While Smith et al. (2009) state that there is no formal set of steps for analysis in IPA research, they acknowledge that inexperienced researchers may benefit from guidance. The researcher used the steps shown in Appendix J to analyse the data.

2.10   Ethical considerations

The Cardiff University School of Psychology Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for this study in April 2019. See Appendix K for information on ethical considerations.

2.11   Validity

Yardley's (2000) criteria for assessing qualitative research were used to explore the validity of the study, see Appendix M.

2.12   Researcher's position

During an IPA interview, the researcher must take up contradictory stances. They must bracket pre-conceptions on the topic to avoid introducing bias, but at the same time, prior knowledge can provide insights (Finlay, 2008). The researcher must remain distant and detached but also open and involved in the interview. This tension is explored further in Part Three of this thesis.

IPA involves a double hermeneutic. The researcher interprets the participants' interpretations of their experiences and tries to uncover underlying information in their dialogue. In this study, the researcher was wary of a triple hermeneutic, which

was possible if participants described their child's experiences rather than their own. This is explored further in Part Three.

3   Findings

This section presents the findings of the data analysis. Figure 7 shows the superordinate and subordinate themes. The subordinate themes were initially developed from each transcript through multiple readings of the transcripts, then mixed, transformed and grouped into superordinate themes. The most pertinent quotes are included here to illustrate themes. Appendix L contains full lists of quotes for each theme.

Figure 7 – Thematic map showing superordinate and subordinate themes

3.1 Every school is different

The subordinate themes constituting this superordinate theme concern the characteristics of schools that participants mentioned as either enhancing or degrading their experiences. They cover wide-ranging issues including choosing schools; the knowledge and awareness of staff regarding adoption-related matters; and how school systems and approaches affect adoptive families.

3.1.1 *Choosing schools*

Several participants recalled choosing schools for their children. Their accounts gave a sense of anxiety and a compulsion to find the 'right' school. Linda and Mary shared vivid recollections of their first impressions, indicating that these were meaningful experiences. Mary recalled a reassuring conversation with a headteacher:

> And it was just a really nice, it was a small school. The head showed us round and she was wearing this amazing dress, and when I said, oh I love your dress, she said a pupil, umm, a pupil went on holiday to India and brought it back for me and it's his last day at school, so I thought I would wear it so we could have our photo taken together. And I just thought, well that's just nice isn't it?
>
> (Participant 2, line 78)

Whereas Linda's first impression of two nurseries suggests she was immediately put off by the atmosphere:

> One was um... was so rigid. We just thought, no, that's not gonna, we don't like it. And the other one was quite chaotic, and we thought, no, that's, not gonna work. (Participant 5, line 158)

Some participants sought advice from other adopters, suggesting they wanted to make decisions based on information from others in the same situation. Mary spoke matter-of-factly about 'ruling out' a school, perhaps expressing relief that she had 'dodged a bullet':

> Another school, XXXX, we had a friend with an adopted child and her experience was horrific, so that was ruled out. (Participant 2, line 46)

Mary also mentioned her decision was based on word-of-mouth, suggesting a feeling of security in the experiences of others. This quote illustrates the importance of a school's reputation:

> We'd heard really good things about [school sons attended], it was a really small school… they had like a hundred-plus-year history of looking after looked-after children. (Participant 2, line 55)

3.1.2 *Staff knowledge awareness and understanding*

Participants were grateful and reassured when staff either knew about adoption-related issues or were prepared to learn. Donna seemed pleasantly surprised by one SENDCo's willingness:

> The SENDCo at the previous school actually went away and was prepared to read all the Louise Bombér books and everything, so she went away and she's educated herself. (Participant 1, line 759)

Linda articulated her concern that a lack of knowledge led to poorly implemented interventions:

> So they do sensory circuits in the morning, but I think, I don't think they, they don't have a professional doing it, I think they just get a few benches. I think they read a book, and go, right, let's do this. (Participant 5, line 1011)

Participants also recalled varied experiences of understanding on the part of schools. Donna was appreciative of the understanding her son's school has shown:

> …we have found a school that actually has one, listened to us, has worked with us, hasn't immediately thought the behaviour, they've understood the behaviour isn't a choice. They're now starting to see him…
>
> (Participant 1, line 232)

Similarly, Karen spoke of overwhelming relief when her son's new teacher recognised he was struggling. Her use of "finally" suggests that she sensed her family were about to turn a corner after years of frustration.

> When he started in Year 3, we had parent's evening in the October and his teacher, Mr XXX said, I'm a bit worried about [son]. He's really quiet, he's really withdrawn, and you know when you want to say Hallelujah! At last! So I nearly cried at that point… Um, so from that moment, I think we finally, school finally started, or some of the teachers are starting to twig that he may be quiet, but he's not, he's not fine. (Participant 4, line 657)

Other experiences were less positive. Susan became infuriated as she explained her belief that poor experiences with schools seem to be the 'norm' for adoptive families. Her repeated use of "nightmare" implies fear, a terrible dream from which she would like to wake up:

> It's a nightmare. School and children with additional needs from an adoptive background. It's a nightmare. Every single adoptive parent that I've spoken to have had the same issues. Because school, mainstream school, just don't understand. (Participant 3, line 888)

The following recollection from Linda emphasises feelings of disbelief, frustration and sadness that her son's school could not understand his difficulties:

> So the Headmaster was saying, [son] can't take any kind of criticism, he can't take any kind take any kind of rough and tumble, and I'm like, no he can't. So then I said to them, would you put a four-year-old into a playground with a whole load of nine-year olds? They kept sending him out there and then wondering why it all went wrong.
>
> (Participant 5, line 1084)

Mary's account of a conversation with a teaching assistant (TA) expresses similar feelings of disbelief at the failure to recognise that her son was struggling with change:

> …she [TA] said, and [Son A] has been disruptive today, [Son A] is always disruptive but even by his standards he has been disruptive. And I said right, so what's happened today? And she said well we had a new teacher in this morning teaching them phonics, Miss XXX wasn't here, how am I supposed to cope when he's being so disruptive? Oh right, so one of his huge triggers, you have someone new in the class he's never seen before, he didn't know she was going to be in there. Of course he's going to start messing around or chattering, that's when someone's supposed to step in and help him to regulate himself. (Participant 2, line 446)

3.1.3 *Staff training*

Most participants mentioned training as essential in equipping school staff to support their children. Mary recalled attending a training session with school staff, whose reaction following the workshop belied both their lack of knowledge about attachment and trauma and their failure to grasp what Mary was dealing with at home. Mary's exasperation is evident:

> [following trauma and attachment training which two members of school staff attended with parents] And afterwards we were stood in the coffee queue with [Son A's] teachers and they had said, gosh, you know, that was awful. How would you even cope with that? And we had said, well, that's what we go through, everyday! All the time! And they were really shocked.
>
> (Participant 2, line 487)

Susan felt that staff had to be willing to apply the concepts in the classroom. There is a sense of futility in what she said:

> They say they have all this training. They have adoption agencies coming in and giving all sorts of courses and training, and stuff. But unless you've got the staff that's willing to listen and work at that training, they ain't got a hope in hell of keeping a child like [Daughter B] in a mainstream school.
>
> (Participant 3, line 892)

Linda voiced similar feelings of irritation about the oversimplification of attachment training:

> And the idea that you, that you do attachment training is... I mean [son] must have every attachment style in the book and we all do, we're all... We attach to different people in different ways, you know, to just say [son] might have an avoidant style, well he might have an avoidant style with one person. He might have secure attachment with someone else. I sometimes feel like schools have quite a simplified understanding of attachment and a sort of one size fits all approach to it and don't consider individual children and their individual needs. And how varied that can be in different situations. (Participant 5, line 1556)

3.1.4 *The Approach*

This subordinate theme consists of several elements which taken together, constitute a school's approach. These elements are ethos, academic pressure, little things which make a big difference, (in)flexibility and exclusion. Two participants mentioned that a whole-school ethos of nurture was the best way to promote the

well-being of all pupils, not just those who had experienced early adversity, as mentioned by Donna:

> And as the SENDCo says a lot of what they do actually benefits all the children.
> It's not just, the changes, what they do, it's a whole-school ethos.
> (Participant 1, line 804)

Every participant alluded to their belief that some schools focus heavily on academic results, which was unlikely to suit their children. Mary's aversion to this approach is evident in her emotive language:

> … they're an outstanding school and their emphasis is on results and I have other friends who's children, who's adopted children have been there, who have been pulled out because their experience is horrific… (Participant 2, 50)

Several participants made it clear that they were not expecting schools to make wholesale changes. It was often the smallest changes that made the most significant impact, like in Donna's example:

> It's just little things like the teacher just giving him a… acknowledging him and smiling at him. (Participant 1, line 503)

Equally, little things could have a negative impact. Karen gave examples of small moments during the day that though seemingly inconsequential, had a significant effect on her son:

> … somebody shouted, um, you know, he was made to go to assembly, and it was singing assembly and he doesn't like this. (Participant 4, line 831)

Almost all participants could recall experiences where the school's flexibility, or lack thereof, was critical. In a vivid recollection, Mary spoke of trembling as she summoned the courage to confront the deputy headteacher, an indication of how willing she was to step outside her comfort zone while fighting for her child. Her final, whispered "right" suggests a reluctant recognition that the school would not be flexible:

> … we had asked them about the behaviour policy … And the deputy head rang me after this last meeting and said, no, we won't be changing the behaviour policy. And I said, oh, have you, do you have exper– I mean I hate confrontation so this, I was literally on the phone shaking, I said have you got experience of working with traumatised children? Well it's, well you know, we have to stick to the behaviour policy. [whispered] Right. (Participant 2, line 393)

Susan shouted as she recalled a school's refusal to be flexible around her daughter's toileting:

> [Daughter B] still soils herself. She goes to the toilet and refuses to wipe herself. And I've specially asked, and asked, and asked, but we're not allowed to do this. But then she gets upset then, when she's got mess in her pants, and she can't undress herself. And she'll just sit there and freak. Well, help her! I'm giving you my permission to help my child when I can't. Surely that's something that you should be doing. (Participant 3, line 781)

There were some experiences of flexibility, such as Karen's son's teacher allowing him to use toilet breaks as time out:

> …she [teacher] said no other child in the class is allowed to go to the toilet as often as he is. But she, when he says, oh I need the toilet, she lets him go. (Participant 4, line 1509)

Two participants described experiences of exclusion, in a formal sense and in less obvious ways. The pain Susan feels on behalf of her daughter is palpable in her description of exclusion:

> … it was just awful. It was really dreadful. They were excluding her. They were sending her home illegally. They, um, reduced her timetable. Whenever she was naughty, she was sent to a room and just sat in a corner and done nothing. And she was just so upset because she couldn't be part of the same class. (Participant 3, line 58)

Linda spoke of exclusion at the hands of other parents. Her words suggest that exclusion extended beyond her son, and became a rejection of her whole family:

> And then on Monday they said you've got to come pick him up straight away. We've had two parents here saying their children aren't coming to school if [son] is here, so [son] can't be here. (Participant 5, line 1184)

She continued:

> I remember that evening, they sent me an email saying he was not coming back and we ask you, we'd like you to agree that you voluntarily withdraw him, so that he doesn't have it on his record. (Participant 5, line 1210)

3.1.5 *Communication*

Many of the participants' experiences involved communication between home and school. Donna emphasised the value of two-way communication:

> … I think a lot of it is keeping a dialogue with school. The biggest thing for me is just keep touching base, keep that communication line open. Tell them when there's been a big change because things do happen and if you don't keep the school informed… It's a two-way communication, you expect them, so you need to let them know what's going on. (Participant 1, 837)

Whereas Linda highlighted the potential for over-communication to become problematic. Here she described her visceral reaction:

> …she [teacher] used to ring us every day, and I'm like, why are you ringing? She's saying, oh to tell you he's done really well. Like, OK, but every time I see the school come up on my phone, you know my heart like races. It was almost like a bit too much information.
> (Participant 5, 642)

Susan summarised her experience of meetings at school, with her repetitive language indicating senselessness and stuckness. Her use of "they" defines the boundary between the family and the school:

> We had meetings and meetings and meetings and meetings and meetings. We always felt like we came away from the meeting, and… you know, there was another meeting for the sake of another meeting… They were all saying what they wanted to say, and then they said let's come back in six weeks and we'll figure out what's happened then. And then we come to the next meeting and it's like, well nothing's been done.
>
> (Participant 3, line 404)

3.1.6 *The school environment*

The physical school environment was an important factor, although it affected the participants' children rather than the participants themselves. Susan recalled the impact of building work on her daughter:

> … they had a new building, so all of the Reception children were in there. This is the classroom, out there was the hall, and they had 90 other children out in that little area out there. So not, there was no quiet area for [Daughter B] to go to, um, it was a different building from where [Daughter A] was. Um, so if [Daughter B] wanted to go to the toilet, she'd go out to 90 children and be like [gasp]. Overwhelmed. And then she'd come back into the classroom and still hear those children outside, so even if the class was quiet, those children out there were all really loud. So, there's no quiet space for her. (Participant 3, 101)

Susan also talked about her daughter's reaction to seeing bars on a window at school, and her attempts to reassure her:

> [Daughter B] had a dream that the school had jails. And she was just gonna be a locked in a jail, so her anxiety is err… unbelievably high…. they've got some grids on the window which look like a prison, but, they, they assured her that it's not jail, it's just where the kids are out playing, it's to save the windows. Erm, and she, every day she'll go past saying, look there is a jail Mum, and I'm like it's not a jail, but she's just kind of fixating. (Participant 3, line 265)

3.2 <u>Transitions</u>

The theme of transition occurred throughout the participants' accounts, whether they were reflecting on past transitions, or anticipating future ones. Several key transition points became salient.

3.2.1 *Reception into Year 1*

The move from Reception into the more formal learning environment of Year 1 seemed to be a flashpoint for several participants' children, as described by Donna:

> We had, until the start of Year 1 we actually had, there were very little signs of any problems. It was the start of formal learning, expecting him to stay in one place and not have any freedom [laughter]. (Participant 1, line 830)

Mary experienced a similar change and attributed it to the more relaxed atmosphere of the Reception classroom:

> I think it was because… it was, there was so much play. They could direct a lot of their own activities. They sat behind a desk for short times. They were off playing, there wasn't that pressure to do things that were way beyond him.
> (Participant 2, line 697)

3.2.2 *The honeymoon period*

Some participants observed that their children went through a problem-free period following a transition, and it was only later that problems began. Linda ascribed this to her son's level of comfort in the new environment:

> He was fine. [Son] was always fine for a while and then when he feels comfortable, it all comes out. (Participant 5, 415)

3.2.3 *From primary to secondary*

Several participants expressed apprehension about secondary school. Karen voiced specific worries around her son's executive functioning:

> I don't think he's gonna cope. I think it's all just going to be too many people and too much to think about. His executive functioning is awful. He's not going to remember, um, like books and PE kits and all the rest of it.
>
> (Participant 4, line 163)

Linda felt that the expectations would be too much for her son. Her repetition of "he is not going" implies her determination to protect her son from a potentially harmful experience:

> All of his friends are gonna be going to this school called [School C] in [hometown] which is massive, very strict. Very academic. He is not going. He really wants to go there. He is not going, unless there's a miracle in the next two years. Because you get, um, whatever they're called, these black marks against your name just for not having your shirt tucked in, it's so strict. And if you talk back, which [son] does without even thinking, all the time, he's just going to be constantly in trouble. (Participant 5, line 1401)

Sharon's anxieties about her son centred around the change in the level of pastoral care:

> I: So how are you feeling in general about the move to secondary?
>
> R: Nervous. Very nervous for a whole load of reasons. Obviously his vulnerability is massive… And also, you know, primary is a nice nurturing environment. There's not many places where you can hide in a primary school and all the teachers know all the kids really, um, but secondary is not like that… I just don't know how, how he'll cope with it. (Participant 6, line 605)

3.2.4   *Aspirations*

Despite their anxiety about the future, several participants expressed hope. Here, Donna was especially hopeful:

> …we're all hoping he can move away from needing full 1-1 support… we're hoping that as he settles into secondary, to move back to a safe space.
>
> (Participant 1, line 660)

As was Susan:

> But now, she's settled, you know, she, she just wants to be a kid, and that's what I want for her. I want her to have the life that she deserves.
>
> (Participant 3, line 915)

3.3   Parents taking action

For many participants, the anger and frustration arising from experiences with schools spurred them into action on behalf of their children. This superordinate theme includes four subordinate themes around the idea of adoptive parents going above and beyond to advocate for their children.

3.3.1   *Parents as experts*

Each participant recalled instances of needing to educate school staff about their children. They found themselves in the position of knowing more about how to support their children than school did, such as this example given by Donna:

> And that's one of the things I very much trained everyone who's with him to do is, even with him you're much better off telling him what you want him to do, not what you don't want him to do, because he won't actually at times hear the 'not' part. (Participant 1, line 430)

Mary emphasised the challenge of ensuring that her son's teachers looked beyond his behaviour:

> I had said, you know, if you can, when he's messing around in class, he's trying to tell you something. So he's, his behaviour is just a signal to let you know that there's something going on. (Participant 2, line 317)

Sharon observed that adoptive parents need to be experts in areas such as Pupil Premium Plus:

> I think again, it relies on parents knowing what their children need to be able to say, we'd like you to use it for this. (Participant 6, line 985)

However, schools are not always open to guidance from adoptive parents, as Susan's disappointment in this quote highlights:

> … they need extra time with the parent. Because I didn't know this teacher before she started working with my daughter. If she'd have come to me and asked me how I wanted her to work with [Daughter B], then there would be more of a, a better understanding. She went to the Headteacher who only knows the background a little bit. If they met with the parent to know what was going on, they'd have better understanding of what is happening with that child. (Participant 3, line 789)

It often fell to the participants to initiate conversations with schools. In Mary's case:

> We'd also asked about doing an EHCP, which they hadn't suggested prior to that at all. (Participant 2, line 401)

Karen gave a sense of needing to think one step ahead:

> … 'cause now I'm in all the time saying, right, what classes is he in, transition, when are we doing this, when are we doing that? (Participant 4, line 444)

Susan's account showed she was the driving force behind change:

> … although I will say that their statement is still wrong, or her statement is still wrong. I've asked for it to be changed and it still hasn't… so I have mentioned it to the lady that dealt with it, but she hasn't done anything about it so I'll give her a ring today. (Participant 3, line 609)

3.3.2 *The battle!*

Something that resonated through every participant's account was the need to battle – for recognition, belief, respect, support and most importantly for their children. Mary's words here alluded to a single-mindedness:

> I feel like… I have to concentrate all my energy on helping the children and on getting this right for them. (Participant 2, line 1029)

Karen described being bounced around different service providers as she fought to get support for her son:

> I kept saying like, I'd like him to be assessed and you know, perhaps statemented, um, [current LA] are saying it's [home LA's] doing, because we live in [home LA]. [Home LA] are saying school need to do an ed psych assessment. Um, school are saying we're not doing an ed psych assessment 'cause we have three slots a year and [son] is not a priority so we were in a bit of a vicious circle. (Participant 4, line 771)

Karen later reflected on the toll the constant battling takes:

> It's just knackering. It is just absolutely. It's endless and there's always something. You seem to lurch from one thing to the next…
>
> (Participant 4, line 1362)

Sharon seemed uncomfortable that her son only got the support he needed because she fought for it:

> … we will constantly have to be advocating for him to get the support that he needs. And then you feel like they're just going to give it because you're constantly on their back and that's not OK either. (Participant 6, line 918)

3.3.3 *Becoming an insider*

Three participants spoke about taking on roles within the school, and how that gave them an 'insider' view and allowed them to be present for their children. Mary reflected on (reluctantly) joining the parent-teacher association (PTA):

> So I started, a friend had asked me if I would help her to set up like a friends of the school PTA thing, and that's not me but I thought it will mean that the kids see me at school when there are things like events that might trigger them like discos or stuff I can be there. So I did that and I made sure I went on all the school trips. (Participant 2, line 267)

Similarly, Karen mentioned that her involvement in school was all part of her "cunning plan":

> I'm on the PTA in school. Um, it's all, it's all deliberate because the more time I spend in school, the more time I get to know people and see what's going on. And you know, so it's the cunning plan. (Participant 4, line 864)

Sharon was a school governor, but expressed ambivalence about her dual role:

> As a governor I think knew a bit more information than was good for me. But if I knew that we as a school had concerns about the SENCo, then I wasn't going to put my trust in the fact that she was going to do something about it. And I also don't... I didn't want her to be on it because I was a governor. I wanted her to be on it because my son needed her attention. (Participant 6, line 475)

3.4   Learning

This superordinate theme encompasses participants' attitudes towards academic progress, their belief that security precedes learning, and experiences of schools lacking sensitivity towards adoptive families.

3.4.1   *"Their emotional and mental health is what's important"*

Some participants were clear that academic progress was a secondary concern, compared to their children feeling secure in school, as illustrated by Mary:

> I'm not bothered about where they are level wise. Their emotional and mental health is what's important. I'm not bothered about the other side of things, at the moment. (Participant 2, line 586)

Karen expressed relief and gratitude that her son's teacher agreed:

> …she's [teacher] like, I'm not pushing him. She said, I know he's Year 5. Um, he hates writing. She said so, um, she said, I just want him to feel happy and safe. And that's what I want. You know, I'm not about, you know, 16 GCSEs and all the rest of it. Just want him to be happy and to feel safe. 'Cause unless he feels safe, he's not gonna, he's not going to do anything. (Participant 4, line 1490)

As did Donna:

> …so they recognised, they… they weren't a school who thought he's got to be able to learn, because he is very bright. They recognised they needed to work with him to get him emotionally secure, to trust them, to be happy, and he is starting to learn again, and he's making great leaps. (Participant 1, line 132)

Several participants stressed their conviction that security before learning was not just preferable, but essential. Sharon said:

> … and I say now he's ready to learn in Year 5 whereas probably in Year 2, 3 and 4, he wasn't safe enough to be able to learn. (Participant 6, line 258)

3.4.2 *Sensitive topics*

Three participants recalled experiences of schools lacking sensitivity to the unique characteristics of adopted families, including the pre-adoption experiences of their children. Mary became emotional as she recalled this gut-wrenching experience of reading her son's work:

> … the teacher had written a question for him to answer, and it said, imagine you are an owl baby and you wake up one morning to find your mummy has gone. How would you feel? And [Son B] had written, I would feel very afraid. And I thought, you have, I was really sick, you have asked my child – I don't think any five or six-year-old at school should be asked that question or be put in that position. But a child who that has happened to multiple times?
>
> (Participant 2, line 716)

Sharon felt these issues were inevitable:

> … we had, uh, the thing that every adoptive parent dreads is the, bring in photos of when you were a baby and let's talk about how families come together. And we're like, really? Don't. And it just felt like, it seems like you must've had other adopted children, come on. You know, so we had to sort of face that. (Participant 6, line 146)

3.4.3 *"He does not want to be lumped in with that group"*

Two participants reflected on situations where their children were included in intervention groups with children with different needs. Although hesitant, this quote from Mary suggests she was unhappy with the intervention provided for her son:

> … they took him out, um most mornings for about fifteen minutes, but they took him out with a couple of other children who had really profound disabilities and he did [a physical activity group] with them. And I just thought, I didn't, I wasn't sure if that was really quite appropriate.
>
> (Participant 2, line 310)

In Linda's case, she was aware that her son found being grouped with children with SEN uncomfortable:

> Interviewer: So do you feel the nurture group was helpful? Do you think it helped him?
>
> Respondent: It was at the time? Um, because it felt special then. But then he just got really bored of it. Mainly because it was for people with special needs and [Son] does not identify himself as somebody with special needs. Or rather he does not want to be lumped in with that group. Um, he just wants to be like everybody else. (Participant 5, line 566)

There were also concerns that Pupil Premium Plus funds were used to fund general SEN interventions rather than targeting their child's specific needs. Mary remembered:

> We got a letter about his Pupil Premium, because he was in an intervention group with eight other kids in his class who were a little bit behind. And they, that's what they were using his Pupil Premium for… so it didn't go on anything that was… specific to help [Son A] or was that attachment or trauma informed. (Participant 2, line 670)

3.5   The power of people

A recurring theme in all participants' accounts was the power of individuals to 'make or break' their child's journey through school. Examples included adults trying to form strong relationships with their children, stark individual differences in relational and teaching styles, specific members of staff who stood out, and the importance of friendships.

3.5.1 *The adults who matter*

Donna mentioned the importance of having someone who knew her son well:

> … it's having somebody who knows him and can read him and can see when he starts to dysregulate before it gets to be a problem. And can distract him. Can find, knows, has got the toolbox of things they can do to…
>
> (Participant 1, line 390)

Here, Susan expressed joy at the relationship between her daughter and her daughter's teacher:

> Never seen her so happy to run into school to see the teacher. She ran in and gave her a massive hug. It was lush to see, absolutely lush.
>
> (Participant 3, line 859)

Linda had similar warm memories of a teacher who made time for her son:

> [Son] just loved her, and she let him come in at lunchtime and just sit while she had her lunch. So that's, that's what he did. (Participant 5, line 602)

Adult-child relationships provided a source of safety in school that the participants' children desperately needed. In Donna's case:

> … he needs to know that people are thinking of him. Even just a gentle, his teacher says just a gentle touch on the shoulder as she's walking round the classroom, just is a reassuring fact that she does knows he's there.
>
> (Participant 1, line 402)

Several participants alluded to the negative impact of adult-child relationships ending, usually because the adult left the school. Karen expressed sadness on behalf of her son:

> But guttingly, she hasn't got the job for next year. So he [son] is, really upset about it and he's really bothered about it at the moment that um, she's not gonna be there. (Participant 4, line 1525)

This experience was especially devasting to Linda, who recalled finding out that her son's teacher was leaving:

> …she [Year 4 teacher] called me in, um, for a meeting, and I'm like, what's this about? She said, I need to tell you that I'm leaving and I haven't told... the announcement's going out tomorrow but I need to tell you the day before so you can prepare... you know, when [son] comes out of school, that's what has happened. And I just cried and was like, why are you going? I didn't say this but, why couldn't you have either not taught him at all or waited until the end?... So then [son] came home that day and he almost put his fist through a door. I mean, he was absolutely... he was just beside himself.
>
> (Participant 5, line 808)

3.5.2   *Individuals make the difference*

Participants repeatedly mentioned that it was individuals who were crucial to their experiences with schools, for better and for worse. What emerges is an impression that because there was so much variation between individual approaches, the participants' experiences over the years were often disjointed, shifting rapidly from positive to negative. In Susan's case, it was differences between teachers:

> I genuinely do believe that… it's down to the individual teacher, erm, rather than necessarily the school. (Participant 3, line 906)

Karen hinted at something similar:

> Miss AAA is lovely, but she's not, she's not Miss ZZZ, 'cause Miss ZZZ totally gets him. …parent's evening, first thing she said to me was, um, I love him. She is fabulous. (Participant 4, line 1531)

Linda gave contrasting impressions of her son's teachers. First:

> … he got this amazing teacher and he changed completely at home. Um, he would get up, or go to bed and go, I can't believe I'm looking forward to seeing Miss BBB tomorrow… You know, he was just like this different boy, completely different boy... She's very, she's very good at making relationships with every single person in the room. She's very authoritative. Um, she's very managerial. Um, very energetic. (Participant 5, line 775)

And then:

> It was a really useless teacher. Poor her, but she was utterly useless... So we met the new teacher on the first week and uh, said, it's really important you make a relationship with him and we could just see she was dead behind the eyes. (Participant 5, line 849)

There were some occasions where external professionals became involved in school issues, and again, their approaches made a big difference. Mary's words express relief and a sense of security, thanks to a social worker's actions:

> … our post-adoption social worker came to see me, and she said, do you want me to come back into school for a meeting. And we said no because we don't think it would achieve anything. And she said well, I just wanted to let you know that we'll support you in any way we can. Um, so that's nice, it's nice to have that even in the background just to know that someone thinks we're not entirely mad. (Participant 2, line 649)

The impact of individuals also included other pupils, as Karen recalled:

> … he ended up with, um, a little girl who's also got major, major issues. Um, used to cause lots and lots of problems, um, and used to wind him up a treat, which she still does. (Participant 4, line 464)

3.5.3 _Friendships_

All participants expressed anxieties about their children's friendships. Some felt that their children did not understand friendship, as explained by Susan:

> I don't think [Daughter B] realises the impact of friendship, just yet. Um… She just can't, she hasn't got boundaries let's say for friendships maybe.
>
> (Participant 3, line 647)

Sharon spoke of concern about friendships fraught with difficulties due to her son's vulnerability:

> He was unfortunately in a, um, a three-way friendship with two girls, one of whom we know the parents really, really well. And she's great. The other girl, we don't know the family in particular and she comes across as being quite manipulative and, um, very, very controlling. Um, and we were concerned about that friendship… He talks about lots of people, but he doesn't have friendships, particularly, with other children.
>
> (Participant 6, line 286)

Linda spoke passionately of her feelings when another parent ended her son's only friendship:

> So very quickly, [Son] became a naughty boy, and the mother of his friend who was at nursery took the child away from the school. So [Son] had no friends. Absolutely devastated. (Participant 5, line 424)

3.6 IMPACT!

Listening to each participant's story left the researcher with an overwhelming sense of the impact educational experiences had on the participants and their family. Feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, anger, frustration and belittlement are woven into their narratives.

3.6.1 Emotional IMPACT!

Different forms of shame prevailed throughout the participants' accounts. Some spoke of shame when being summoned to talk to staff in front of other parents. Karen remembered one teacher who would shout across the playground. Her recollection suggests an almost comic tragedy to the scene:

> … she [teacher] would stand on the door and go, um, Fred's mum - not a good day today! In front of all the waiting parents. (Participant 4, line 384)

Linda was explicit about the feelings after-school conversations evoked:

> … they'd come out and tell me, when it started, they'd come out every day and give me some tale of woe… Oh, it was just absolutely dreadful. Dreadful. Because it's so shaming in front of the other mothers. And actually, I didn't respond well. (Participant 5, line 203)

A core factor of the shame was judgement, perceived or real, from other parents. Others spoke of shame about their child's behaviour, and how it affected their sense of efficacy as parents. Sharon spoke of shame reinforcing blame:

> I think it just reinforced that we must be doing something wrong, which is the place we've got ourselves into anyway. That we were bad parents. That somehow we were doing something that was wrong. (Participant 6, line 228)

Mary explained that the shame she felt extended to her children as they witnessed after-school conversations:

> Um, she was, it was just awful. I can't remember everything that she'd said but we walked down the steps and for the first time at school, [Son A] just lay on the floor and went berserk. (Participant 2, line 457)

Others talked of the intense shame their children felt when something went wrong in school. Linda recalled the frustration of trying to explain her son's shame:

> And I'm like, well he does care. He cares intensely. And that is a shaming place
> for him. I mean basically what he [the headteacher] was saying is that school is
> not set up to deal with children like this 'cause they can't catch them because
> as soon as [Son] has gone into a shame position, he cannot come out of it. He
> digs in his heels and nothing will make him come out of it.
>
> (Participant 5, line 892)

Guilt was another intense emotion. Some felt guilty about not recognising their children's difficulties earlier. Karen's expression of guilt here was heartrending:

> I didn't realise, to be honest, I feel awful about it now, how stressful he found
> school because you don't know what's going on do you? I had no idea what's
> going on between sort of nine and three. He wasn't good at telling me. Looking
> back now, I feel really guilty for not realising quite how stressful he found
> school and how he finds school now. (Participant 4, line 363)

As was Linda's:

> …and I still feel very badly about that nursery. Um, and well, we shouldn't have
> sent him so much. Should've been at home... doing stuff with us, but we
> thought we were doing the right thing. (Participant 5, line 141)

Some participants felt guilty that their child got a place in their chosen school, although Karen's guilt was tempered by an understanding that it was the best outcome:

> So he got in, even though we live out of county and all the rest of it, he got in
> and 11 children didn't. I did feel guilty at the time. I don't anymore [laughter].
>
> (Participant 3, line 73)

Participants' anger at being 'fobbed off' by schools was tangible, as in this quote from Mary:

> [sigh] I would have liked them to have taken us seriously from the start, and not just nodded along and given us the right answers. (Participant 2, line 661)

Karen became angry as she recalled the off-hand way an ALNCo communicated important information:

> … the, um, ALNCo in school twice now, last, this year and last year, she passes me in the corridor and goes, oh, we haven't got an ed psych assessment for [son] again this year…. This year she, again, she passed me in the corridor and goes and goes, oh, he hasn't got a slot again this year. (Participant 4, 895)

Several participants spoke of being patronised by staff, leading to feelings of infuriation. Mary's experience was especially vexing:

> But the Head said, if there's one piece of advice I can give you, it would be this. And I could feel my face clenching. She said her father had had, um, a type of schizophrenia that was hereditary, and her daughter when she was young had started displaying certain behaviours, so she'd taken her to the doctor. The doctor had said, just treat her normally as though there's nothing wrong. So she said, that's the best advice I could give you [sigh]. (Participant 2, line 525)

Linda's experience illustrates the mismatch between well-meaning advice and what adoptive families face at home:

> And he [headteacher] said to me to, do you shout at [son]? And I said, of course I shout at him. He's really annoying! And he said, well I always feel better if I don't shout at my kids. And I'm like, yeah, well, try living with [son]. Try living with somebody whose life depends on not doing what you're asking them to do because they're so anxious, they can't, they can't do anything.
>
> (Participant 5, line 1581)

Feelings of distrust in schools arose following broken promises, and are stark In Mary's account:

> I asked if he could bring some things from home, and they said well we'll make a little box and do that with the Emotional Well-being Officer and he can put some things in, which, he selected his things really carefully and took those in, but then I found out they wouldn't let him take them! They wouldn't let him use them! … What's the use of that? It's there for him to help regulate himself and feel safe! (Participant 2, line 331)

Many spoke of their children presenting differently at home and at school, and of bearing the brunt of their children concealing their emotions at school. Sharon explained:

> I think for the whole five years that he's been at school, he is the model child. He's completely under the radar. He's completely compliant. He is smiley. He is, um, you know, he does what he's expected to do and then he explodes, he comes home. (Participant 6, line 178)

When difficulties at home were not recognised or believed by schools, there was a hugely negative impact on the family, as related by Karen:

> … we are seeing of all the issues we were having at home and we were having hell, you know, he was violent and whatever. I've had numerous black eyes, cuts, bruises, the lot. Um, and she's [the teacher] just sat there, going, no, we don't see any of that. It's fine. We don't see any of that. (Participant 4, line 958)

Sharon explained the toll this took:

> I think that the period of time when we were really struggling and felt like we weren't believed that was probably the worst time, um, in that there was just such a disparity between the two sides of [Son B]. We never knew which one was going to wake up in the morning… But I think that isolation that we then probably was more extreme because nobody really knew what was going on.
>
> (Participant 6, line 1023)

Donna spoke of her relief that her son presented similarly at home and school, so school were able to see his real emotions and behaviour, but recognised that this is not the typical experience of adoptive parents:

> I think it's the school's talked to us, they've believed us. They haven't said… we are fortunate we have a child who presents the same everywhere. He's not a child who holds it together at school. Err, I have a nephew who does that, and I know how hard that is. (Participant 1, line 732)

3.6.2   *IMPACT! on the whole family*

Most participants spoke of the far-reaching impact events at school had on family life. Mary recalled feelings of isolation when her son was finding school especially stressful:

> … one night I found him and he was just covered in blood, and he'd tried to pull his teeth out. Not loose teeth, his back teeth and he was saying, I just want to die Mummy, I just want to die. I thought how can, so there's no… we felt we had nowhere to go. (Participant 2, line 598)

Susan spoke movingly about the impact school moves can have on siblings:

> [Daughter A] is devasted I've had to move her sister... she worries so badly about [Daughter B]. She's been crying in the night, I'm missing my sister and, you know, I don't know where she is, I don't know whether she's safe... I have never seen her sob the way she sobbed when her sister left. It was heart-breaking. (Participant 3, line 227)

There was a resigned acceptance to the way Karen described her son's behaviour at home and how it affected the family:

> So, he saves it all up, all day and then comes out of school and literally explodes. So, and takes it out on me. So, he's being very, very violent. So, we'd have like two or three hours every night of, um, him being violent and disruptive and throwing things and generally wrecking the place and whatever. (Participant 4, line 341)

Linda talked about leaving work to support her son with a flexible timetable, but also reflected on the advantages:

> I will be doing the lion's share of all the care. Um, getting him from one thing to another. So I've, uh, pretty much stopped working. Um, but my, our relationship at home, our relationships are much better, you know, I don't get angry anymore. (Participant 5, line 1351)

3.6.3 *IMPACT! on others*

Despite all the challenges they were facing at home, several parents expressed concern about the impact their children had on others at school. Linda voiced unease about one teacher's health:

> I worry about her [teacher] actually. She's diabetic, type one diabetic and I worry that she pushes herself far too hard. (Participant 5, line 600)

While Susan recalled extreme concern about her daughter's teacher:

> Last year she had… Mrs XXX… and I can remember going into a meeting with her, and sending an email to the Head saying, something needs to be done. If [Daughter B] doesn't leave this school soon, I think you're gonna lose your teacher. Because the way your teacher was talking about my daughter, made me feel like she was majorly stressed, um, and she couldn't deal with what was going on. Erm, and this was early sort of stages into the year as well, and honestly, she looked drained, she looked petrified. So, I said something either needs to be done for [Daughter B] so that she's got support or you're gonna lose your staff. (Participant 3, line 679)

Donna worried that her son's behaviour might impact other children:

> And, the trouble is when he starts to struggle, he starts, he retreats to being an animal and making lots of noise so which of course is a big dis-, not good for the other children. (Participant 1, line 553)

4   Discussion

4.1   Findings linked to existing literature and psychological theory

This study aimed to explore the research question: What experiences have adoptive parents had with schools, and how do they make sense of those experiences? Using IPA allowed exploration of adoptive parents' experiences with a greater depth of interpretation than previous research. This section discusses the findings in relation to the research question and existing literature and makes links to psychological theory. The discussion is structured around the six superordinate themes drawn from the data.

4.1.1   *Every school is different*

This theme encompassed a broad and diverse range of experiences. It contained valuable insights into how distinct within-school factors affect adoptive parents' experiences.

Several participants recalled choosing schools and highlighted the value of information from other adopters. As Dance (2015) points out, most adopters are first-time parents, so are likely to value the expertise and experiences of other adopters.

Some participants reported poor understanding or awareness from schools regarding their child's difficulties, a source of much frustration. However, Donna and Karen described more positive experiences, demonstrating the variation between schools. The consensus among participants in the present study was that attachment and trauma training for school staff is vital, but sometimes implemented poorly. Research from Fancourt (2019) and Dingwall and Sebba (2018) illustrates the benefits of training, but Webber (2017) cautions that it needs to be more than a tick-box exercise. The experiences shared in this study suggest a need for approaches learned through training to be embedded throughout the whole school community.

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The approach schools take towards issues such as academic outcomes, behaviour management, and exclusion seems to be crucial. Several participants were resistant to schools emphasising educational outcomes, especially at secondary level. The growing awareness that schools are responsible for emotional well-being as well as academic outcomes (Adoption UK, 2019b) was not borne out in the accounts shared in the present study.

Adoption UK (2019a) found that adopted children are far more likely to be excluded from school. The findings of the present study emphasise the devasting impact that exclusion has on the well-being of adoptees and their families, also expounded by Parker, Paget, Ford and Gwernan-Jones (2016).

Several participants raised the importance of home-school communication. However, there was the potential for communication to become overwhelming. This links to the superordinate theme 'IMPACT!' because some participants reported that communication (particularly after-school conversations) induced feelings of shame and guilt. Stother, Woods and McIntosh (2019) cite communication as one of four core aspects of providing post-adoption support in educational settings. The findings of the present study suggest some schools need to reconsider how they communicate with adoptive families.

4.1.2 _Transitions_

Transitions were often difficult for the participants' children, a phenomenon described by Bombèr (2007) and Gore Langton and Boy (2017). Some participants described a 'honeymoon period' before difficulties emerged, which is an under-researched concept. The move from Reception into Year 1 seemed to be particularly hard, which may reflect a change in expectations and structure. Many participants expressed anxiety about future transitions, especially the move to secondary school, which Selwyn and Meakings (2017) also highlighted as a tricky time. Secondary schools may provide less personalised support for pupils with attachment/trauma-related needs (Estyn, 2020; King, 2009), which could explain why some adopted pupils find secondary school more challenging. Bergin and Bergin (2009) suggested

that strong relationships with school staff can be a protective factor for vulnerable children at times of transition.

4.1.3 *Parents taking action*

All participants recalled advocating for their children. Examples included sharing expertise with school staff; initiating conversations; battling to get support and taking on roles within the school. The role of adoptive parents as advocates for their children was also identified by Wyman Battalen, Dow-Fleisner and Brodzinsky (2020). While parental advocacy is not unique to adoptive parents, there was a sense in the present study that the participants needed to go 'above and beyond', which was also reported by Weistra and Luke (2017). Selwyn and Meakings (2017) recognised that adoptive parents frequently act as experts.

The present study found that some adoptive parents face constant battles on many fronts which takes an emotional toll on families. This finding matches the national picture (Adoption UK, 2019a) and results from the USA (Goldberg et al., 2017). Initiative-taking has been described in previous research; Karen's recollection of going back and forth between school and two LAs evokes Harlow's (2019b, p. 274) description of adoptive families being "ricocheted around the system in search of help".

Adoptive parents actively becoming insiders was a thought-provoking finding of this study which may be explained by principles from systems theory (Frederickson, 1990). By volunteering in the school, adoptive parents are crossing the boundary between home and school systems and effectively embedding themselves within the school system. Getting inside gives access to conversations which they may not otherwise be privy too and facilitates relationships with school staff. Baker (1997) reported from her focus-group research with parents in the USA that parents become insiders in their children's schools for several reasons, including: to address specific problems; to advocate for their children; to share knowledge about their children with school staff; and to contribute to the success of the school which would ultimately benefit their children. Similarly, Warner (2010) describes how some

parents become involved in school systems to facilitate 'emotional safeguarding' for their children.

The concept of 'enabling dialogue' from the Constructionist Model of Informed Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2017) may be relevant here. By becoming insiders, adoptive parents widen their network of contacts beyond their child's class teacher and the SENDCo/ALNCo to include others who are more receptive to their concerns about their children.

4.1.4 *Learning*

Ensuring that their children were secure in school was the participants' primary concern, before academic progress. Donna recalled her son's school recognising this hierarchy of needs and responding accordingly. The idea that security and relationships in school precede learning is not new (Golding et al., 2013), and The Learning Triangle (Geddes, 2006) provides a theoretical explanation of why schools must ensure the adopted children can access containment through their relationships with adults in the classroom.

Some participants recalled schools lacking sensitivity in terms of curricular content. Mary's experience was particularly emotive. This finding supports previous findings by King (2009), Goldberg et al. (2017) and Sempowicz et al. (2018). The present study revealed the intense emotions some parents experience due to insensitivity. Evidence suggests that the backgrounds of adopted children are often misconceived or unacknowledged (Gore Langton, 2017; Syne et al., 2012; Weistra & Luke, 2017). These kinds of uncomfortable or distressing classroom experiences could have significant negative implications for adult-child relationships in school. Children may become hyper-aware of similar situations reoccurring, further reducing feelings of security in school.

A novel finding of this study was that some participants' children rejected being 'lumped in' with pupils with SEN/ALN. This tension is interesting because evidence shows that adopted pupils are more likely to have SEN/ALN (Zill & Bradford Wilcox,

2018). The difficulty appears to arise where interventions are not specific to adopted pupils' needs but used as a 'one-size-fits-all' solution.

4.1.5   *The power of people*

John Donne wrote that "no man is an island" (1959, p. 108) and the participants' accounts indicate the enormous influence of other people on their experiences. This included relationships between their children and school staff; individual differences in teachers' relational styles; other pupils; friendships; and the influence of external professionals.

It is well-established in the literature that vulnerable children benefit from the opportunity to form attachment relationships with adults in school (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Dingwall & Sebba, 2018; Geddes, 2006). The value of positive adult-child relationships extends across multiple domains (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). They can benefit all pupils, not just those with experiences of early adversity (Webber, 2017). Several participants in the present study recalled problems caused when their child moved into a new class, which they interpreted as a severance of the positive relationships their child had formed with adults over the previous year. This issue is also raised by Harlow (2019a) who argues that schools should provide continuity of relationships for vulnerable children.

Difficulties with friendships featured in several participants' accounts, aligning to Bergin and Bergin's (2009) evidence that children with insecure attachment styles may have lower social competence. For participants in the present study, this seemed to manifest in their childrens' dysfunctional friendships, with resulting implications for self-esteem.

None of the participants reported experiences of adoption-related teasing, which is noteworthy given the high prevalence suggested by multiple researchers (Neil, 2012; Selwyn & Meakings, 2017; Wyman Battalen et al., 2020). However, participants in the present study were not asked explicitly about adoption-related teasing and may have been unaware of their childrens' experiences of it.

4.1.6   IMPACT!

All participants communicated the impact that experiences with schools had on themselves and their family. This included intense experiences of negative emotions such as shame and guilt. Bombèr (2007) described how trauma-experienced children experience toxic levels of shame (although this is an under-researched phenomenon and should be considered with caution), and Hughes (2006) warned that school staff should be aware of the potential to induce shame through their interactions with pupils. Most parents in the present study recalled feeling shame as a result of judgement from others. This may be explained by Weistra and Luke's (2017) finding that adoptive parents are judged more harshly on their children's behaviour. According to Tangey (1995) shame results from public criticism following a breach in accepted norms, and is perpetrated by someone in a position of authority. In the participants' cases, school staff were in a position of authority and the way they interacted with the participants often incited shame. Some participants felt they had been 'fobbed off' or dismissed by schools and LAs when trying to communicate concerns about their children, similar to the findings of Selwyn and Meakings (2017).

Another impact on the parents in this study arose from not being believed, usually because their children presented very differently in school and at home. Not being believed is disempowering. This led to feelings of isolation and caused the participants to question their parenting abilities. Other implications of being 'fobbed off' and disbelieved were feelings of anger, frustration, and mistrust. Waid and Alewine (2018) reported similar findings and reiterated the value of school staff taking time to listen to adoptive parents (Goldberg et al., 2017).

School experiences also impacted on participants' lives in other ways. Some had to stop working to home-educate (or support part-time schooling), which had financial implications but was also a considerable adjustment for the family. Other participants recalled supporting their children through episodes of extreme dysregulation after a day of masking their feelings in school. This undoubtedly has consequences for adoptive parents' well-being, as evidenced by The Department for

Education (2019b). Parents are not the only family members affected by school experiences; as Susan's moving account showed, siblings also feel the impact.

This study found that some participants were concerned about school staff members' health and well-being. This finding reflects Estyn's (2020) recommendation that to support pupils with ACEs effectively, schools must make staff well-being a priority. Some participants expressed gratitude towards staff members who tried to understand adoption-related issues. However, several participants reported encountering school staff who lacked awareness and understanding of how to support adopted children, which is more in-keeping with previous research findings (Evans, 2018; Sebba et al., 2015).

4.2   A bioecological systems perspective

A central finding of the present research was that adoptive parents' experiences are embedded in a systemic context. Figure 8, based on Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) bioecological model of human development, explores some of the interacting and conflicting systems at work in the participants' experiences. See Appendix N for more details on how each aspect of the model is relevant to the findings of this study.
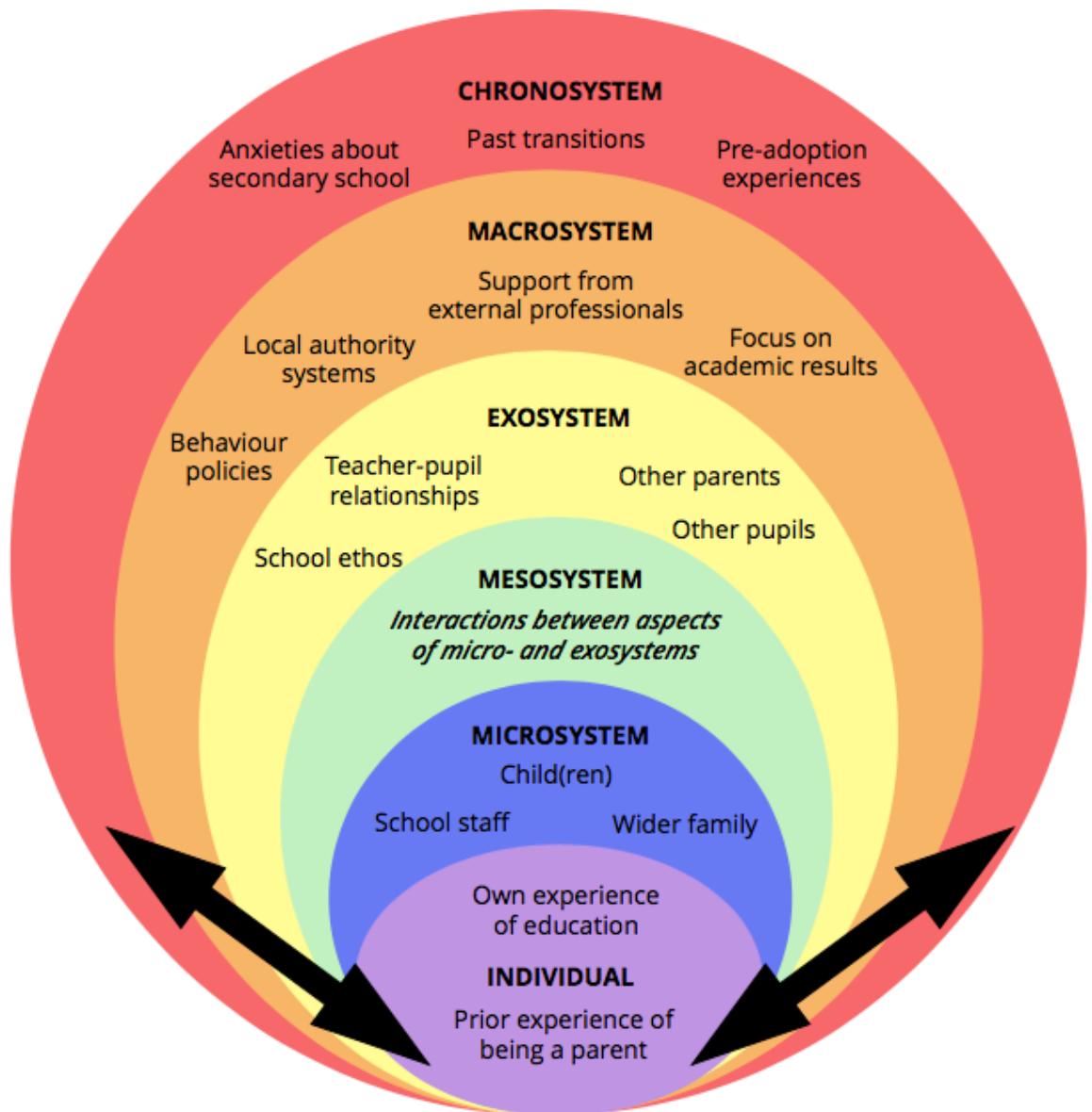
Figure 8 - A bioecological systemic model representing multiple systems which influence adoptive parents' experiences with their children's education

4.3   Strengths and limitations

The strengths and limitations of this research are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 – Strengths and limitations

Strengths	Limitations
• This study gave adoptive parents England and Wales the opportunity to make their voices heard in a more in-depth way than previous research. The use of IPA which involved extended, detailed interviews, and iterative, interpretative analysis meant that their experiences were not just described, but critically interpreted and explored for underlying meanings. While adoptive parents in the UK have been involved in previous research, their data has not yet been subjected to this type of analysis and interpretation. This is, therefore, the researcher's unique contribution to the existing literature. • Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which meant the researcher was free to pursue different lines of enquiry as they naturally arose in the conversation. Participants were interviewed either in their homes, places of work, or other public meeting space, rather than in schools. This was an attempt to mitigate potential bias or limitations on what the participants felt able to talk about. The use of open-ended questions allowed the participants to feel empowered and situated them as the 'expert' on the topics being discussed. This is per the methodological aims of IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2015). • The use of individual face-to-face interviews rather than focus groups or online questionnaires had several advantages. First, the researcher was	• The sample in this study consisted entirely of adoptive mothers, and thus the views of adoptive fathers are not represented. Additionally, the participants were drawn from England and Wales, but not Scotland or Northern Ireland, so the findings do not represent the UK as a whole. As education in the UK is a devolved matter, each nation has differing systems and legislation. However, it is still hoped that some of the higher-order issues raised by this research will apply to schools across the broader national and international contexts. • While this research aimed to gather adoptive parents' experiences, inevitably participants sometimes spoke of their child's experiences instead. This created a 'triple hermeneutic', an additional layer of interpretation above the 'double hermeneutic' described by Smith et al. (2009). The researcher was aware of this during data collection and analysis and made a concerted effort to focus on the parent's interpretation of the experiences, even if they had not been directly involved. • It is acknowledged that the nature of IPA means that the researcher takes an active part in the construction and interpretation of the information shared, during the interviews and the analysis process. The researcher's own experiences, constructions and inherent biases will have moulded the

able to capture more than just words – the non-verbal and linguistic aspects of the conversation were essential. They were held in mind as the researcher analysed and interpreted the data. The experiences captured during the interviews were likely richer and more 'story-like' than had they been collected through an online medium. If focus groups had been used, the parents might have been influenced by the other participants' accounts or been reluctant to share personal experiences in front of others.

- The six participants represented a mixture of geographic locations within England and Wales, meaning that the findings of this data represent the current picture in more than just one locality.

- The introduction of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 in England means that more than ever, schools are explicitly responsible for meeting the needs of adopted children. This research is therefore relevant as it provides insights into what schools do well, and where they may need to rethink their practice, from the perspective of a group of key stakeholders, and provides EPs with some idea of how to act as advocates for adoptive families.

- See Appendix M for a summary of how this research has addressed Yardley's (2000, 2008) framework for assessing validity and quality in qualitative research.

resulting interpretation. Importance will have been ascribed to certain aspects of participants' accounts as a result.

- Recruitment for this research took place through two adoption charities based in the UK. This will have limited the pool of potential participants to those who are involved with the charities. Parents who were not actively engaging with the charities at the time of recruitment are unlikely to have found out about the study.

- The recruitment materials were designed to be neutral and inviting to adoptive parents with positive, negative and neutral experiences of interacting with schools. Nevertheless, those with negative experiences may have been more likely to volunteer, as they may have seen the study as an opportunity to voice their concerns. This possibility was highlighted by one of the participants (Donna), who had had mainly positive experiences with school, and was keen to have that represented. Other parents with positive or neutral experiences may not have felt the research was relevant to them, or worth their time.

- IPA is considered to work best with a relatively homogenous group of participants. This was planned for by only recruiting participants who had an adopted child of primary school age. However, during data collection, it became apparent to the researcher that the primary school phase covers a wide range of development, and so the experiences described were not as homogenous as hoped. This could have been improved by recruiting participants whose children's ages had a smaller range.

4.4   Implications for educational psychologists

This research took a deep dive into the personal experiences of a small group of parents, making it difficult to generalise findings to the broader population (Smith et al., 2009). However, much of what the participants shared reflects trends seen in other research, and so some tentative suggestions will be made for how the results of this study could be useful for EPs working across multiple systems.

There are many excellent resources available for schools, such as 'Becoming an Adoption-Friendly School' (Gore Langton & Boy, 2017), and 'Inside I'm Hurting' (Bombèr, 2007). These books, and others, address many of the issues raised by parents in this study. EPs could support adoptive families by recommending that schools become familiar with these resources.

This research has shown that adoptive parents are experts on their children and have valuable information to offer schools. However, schools may not always communicate effectively with adoptive parents or make the best use of their expertise. EPs, whose work spans school and families, can become advocates and ensure that the voices of adoptive families are heard and respected. This would empower adoptive parents to share their knowledge with schools and help schools to be more receptive. EPs could also play a more significant role in the chronosystem around adoptive families, such as by supporting transitions and aspirations.

This research and previous studies have shown that some school staff lack understanding of adoption-related issues. One finding of this research is that school staff are not always knowledgeable about the backgrounds and ongoing needs of adopted children. EPs can attempt to improve this situation through consultation and training in schools. Where misconceptions about adoption exist, EPs can help to reframe constructions. Some adopted children mask their feelings in school, so do not stand out as vulnerable. EPs could initiate conversations with schools about adopted pupils, to increase their awareness of hidden difficulties. EPs could also

support adoptive parents as they navigate the complex pathways involved in obtaining support for their children.

4.5   Future research

Future directions for research could include:

- a similar study involving parents of older adopted children;
- examination of what works well for adopted pupils in schools, to generate examples of good practice;
- a larger scale study gathering parental voice on adoption-related issues in schools;
- a closer examination of how adopted children manage transitions; and
- research with adopted pupils themselves, to find out about their lived experiences of education (in-depth interviews may not be appropriate, techniques such as the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) could be considered).

4.6   Summary

This research explored the lived experiences of adoptive parents concerning their children's education. The research question was: What experiences have adoptive parents had with schools, and how do they make sense of those experiences? The participants shared rich, emotive and personal stories which highlighted examples of positive and negative practice in schools. Their accounts illustrate the considerable impact that schools, and particularly the people who work in them, have on adoptive families. The findings of this research suggest that most educational settings still have work to do in understanding, recognising and supporting the needs of adoptive families. It is hoped that the findings of this research will contribute to improving the experiences of adoptive families.

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The experiences of adoptive parents with their children's education: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

Part Three: Critical Appraisal

Word count: 5330

Part Three: Critical Appraisal

1   Introduction

The following critical appraisal consists of three sections. The first section begins with a description of the processes used to identify the research topic. Next, I discuss how I explored the existing literature and identified a gap in the research. I then turn to the development of the research question. Through this, I demonstrate the development of the rationale for the study.

In the second section, I reflect on the decisions made while conducting the literature review. I go on to discuss methodological considerations raised by this research, including alternative methodologies which were considered. I also discuss issues surrounding the selection and recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis. Ethical considerations raised by the research are highlighted and addressed. I also consider the implications of my position as a researcher.

In the third section, I consider the contributions this research makes to existing knowledge. I also examine how the findings could be developed and disseminated. Potential contributions to future research are discussed. Finally, I investigate the implications for my practice as an educational psychologist.

This part of the thesis is written in the first person, emphasising my role as a reflective and reflexive practitioner actively involved in the development and enactment of the research, rather than an objective observer (Pellegrini, 2009).

2 Rationale for the thesis

2.1 Inception of the research topic

The idea of studying adoption arose from a piece of casework during my second fieldwork placement as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP). I worked with a pupil in a nursery class who was exhibiting challenging behaviour. The pupil had been adopted at the age of five months, before which he had been in multiple foster placements. The school were aware that he was adopted but were unaware of how his pre-adoption experiences might have affected his social and emotional functioning. They believed that the pupil had autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and had requested my involvement to gather evidence for an ASD assessment. Through my work with the additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo), class teachers and teaching assistants (TAs), I was able to help them reframe their constructions of the pupil and his behaviour. I delivered training on trauma and attachment, which gave the staff members a greater understanding of the needs of pupils who have experienced early adversity.

I was aware that several staff members believed adoption meant that this pupil should no longer be affected by his pre-adoption experiences. They expressed the view that his current behaviour was unconnected to his early experiences as he was now living with a loving family. I became curious about how well schools understand adoption-related issues, and whether a better understanding would increase their capacity to support adopted pupils with emotional and social difficulties.

Another catalyst was that I have several family members who are either adopted or adopters. Their/their children's needs often went unnoticed in school, or school staff ignored their concerns. I had anecdotal evidence that adoptive families' experiences with schools were not always positive, and I felt that this merited further investigation.

2.2   Identifying and exploring gaps in the literature

My initial brief literature search found a wealth of international research on adoption (helpful overviews are provided by Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010; Wiley, 2017). Much of this focused on identifying and measuring within-child deficits as a result of pre-adoption adversity (e.g. Hornfleck, 2019; Van Ijzendoorn, Juffer, & Poelhuis, 2005; Zill & Bradford Wilcox, 2018).

Further searching revealed that some researchers had explored the voice of adoptive parents. Goldberg and colleagues have collected the views and experiences of parents concerning their children's education (Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Frost, & Black, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2014). They adopted a qualitative approach and used semi-structured interviews alongside thematic analysis. However, this research took place in the USA and mainly focused on parent's sexual orientation as a mediating factor in their experiences with schools.

Adoption UK (2019) conducted population-level research with adoptive families, using questionnaires to collect data from thousands of families at once. This provided an excellent overview of the status quo for adoptive families in the UK. However, education was just one of many topics covered in this research, rather than the focus. This wide-net approach also failed to drill down into the individual experiences of adoptive families, which may mean that valuable idiographic information was lost during analysis.

Previous research carried out by EPs in the UK on the views of adoptive parents on education (Cooper & Johnson, 2007) is over a decade old. They used questionnaires with a sample of 300 adoptive parents, which again, provides broad information about the views of parents, but does not provide insights into their specific experiences with schools.

My search revealed that a personal and interpretative analysis of the experiences of adoptive parents concerning their children's education was a gap in the literature.

2.3 Development of the research question

The research question (What experiences have adoptive parents had with schools, and how do they make sense of those experiences?) flowed naturally from the identified gap in the literature. I felt that by asking adoptive parents about their experiences with schools, and then thinking about how they made sense of them, I could learn more about the impact school experiences can have on adoptive families, both positive and negative. As such, the research question was exploratory.

The process of developing this research question was different from my previous experiences. Most of my earlier research was commissioned by a third party, who already had a research question in mind. This limited my ability to develop a question based on my epistemological and ontological values. This time, I was in control of the development of the research question, which as Robson and McCartan (2016) suggest came from the purpose of the research, my methodological stance, and the influence of existing research. The process felt more organic. A possible implication is that it is harder to justify the usefulness of this research, whereas my previous research was designed to meet a specific need. However, my previous research, with the DNA of the commissioner threaded throughout, was more likely to contain inherent biases and assumptions than the present study, which was not infused with a third-party agenda.

On reflection, the research question I arrived at was broad and open-ended, which suited the kind of exploratory research I hoped to conduct. It may have been clearer to say, "how do they interpret them" rather than "make sense of them". I revised the question several times, to ensure that the focus was on parents' experiences, not their experiences of their child's experiences. This was an attempt to avoid a triple hermeneutic, a quandary which I discuss further in a later section.

My decision to use IPA was based on the research topic and question. I wanted to capture the participants' interpretations of their lived experiences and then submit them to my analysis. IPA is a method intended to do precisely that (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), and was, therefore, a good fit.

3 Critical account of the development of the researcher

3.1 Conducting the literature review

Adoption is a multi-faceted topic which has generated research from multiple academic perspectives, including legal, child development, and family studies approaches. The present study involved consideration of within-school factors such as systems and attitudes, so the literature review needed to include research from an educational perspective. Therefore, the literature review presented in Part 1 was wide-ranging, and the list of academic journals cited represents multiple disciplines including educational psychology, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, social work, legal systems and education in general.

Due to the broad and diverse nature of the existing literature, I took a narrative approach to the literature review, as opposed to a systematic one. Green, Johnson and Adams (2006) argue that narrative reviews are suitable for providing a history of the developments in our understanding of a topic and can also highlight emerging issues that warrant further research. However, Green et al. caution that narrative reviews can lack objectivity if the author selects findings that support a previously held position. I was aware of this possibility while carrying out the literature review and aimed to present the results of previous research critically and objectively. The terms chosen to search databases (see Appendix A) were neutral and open, but specific enough to return relevant results. A narrative approach allowed for the inclusion of 'grey literature' such as government reports and publications from adoption charities, and other non-peer-reviewed sources.

The database searches returned a considerable volume of material (which in hindsight may reflect issues with the search terms), so extensive sifting was required. When choosing which sources to include in my review, and which to exclude, I began with pragmatic considerations. The word 'adopt' and its variants have multiple meanings. Many of the returned articles were about adoption in a different sense. I excluded several promising items as they were not written in English. I wondered

about the implications of this for my review, as only including research from English-speaking countries introduced a level of cultural specificity.

I was unsure whether to include research about internationally adopted children, as I felt that this was not reflective of adoption practice in the UK, which tends to be domestic. However, discussion with my supervisor convinced me to include this research, due to similarities in the experiences of internationally and domestically adopted children.

Reflecting on the outcomes of my literature review, I feel that I achieved appropriate breadth and depth and developed a theoretical and practical rationale for my study. I presented the research evidence critically, highlighting caveats around the methodology of some research. Adoption research is an expansive field, so I had to be selective and have inevitably excluded some research that others would consider essential.

3.2   Methodological considerations

3.2.1   *Ontology and epistemology*

This research investigated the lived experiences of adoptive parents their children's education. The study was underpinned by a relativist ontological stance and a constructivist epistemological stance. The ontological position reflected my belief as a researcher that the type of knowledge under investigation was subjective and could be interpreted in a multitude of ways (Willig, 2008). This gave respect and prominence to the stories being shared by the participants and avoided elevating one interpretation of events over another.

The constructivist epistemological stance taken represents my belief that individuals actively construct their reality, including the construction of knowledge through learning (Braun & Clarke, 2013). My participants shared their constructions of their experiences during the interviews, and these constructions were recognised and valued.

These stances were enshrined in this research through the use of IPA, because IPA respects the idiographic nature of parents' experiences, and does not assume that any given interpretation is more 'correct' than another (Smith et al., 2009). However, while the idiographic nature of the data collected through IPA is a strength, it could also be considered a limitation, as the findings from the data can only really be said to represent the realities of the small sample of participants from which they arose.

3.2.2   *Alternative methodologies*

Willig (2008) suggests that a researcher's ontological and epistemological stances determine the data collection and analysis methods available to them. Different methods reflect beliefs about truth, knowledge and how we can find out more about the world around us. Had I approached this topic with different epistemological and ontological stances, I would probably have conducted my research with different methods.

For example, a positivist stance, in which there is one objective reality accessed through controlled and rigorous observation or experimentation (Willig, 2008), would have led to the adoption of very different methods, such as running an intervention and measuring the impact. However, the idea that only one reality exists and that only one viewpoint is correct did not align with my underlying assumptions about the nature of adoption and the experiences of those involved in it. I have learned from my work as a TEP that to each person's individual construction of reality is their truth, and the impact of being told that their view is 'wrong' can be detrimental and disempowering. Taking a positivist approach to this research would have stripped away much of the human element of the data, which was what I was aiming to capture.

An alternative approach to data collection would have been a larger-scale study involving questionnaires sent out to adoptive parents. However, I decided against this for several reasons. First, I felt that I would be able to collect richer data from my participants by meeting with them face-to-face. A questionnaire also only collects

the data it sets out to collect, and even with open-ended response questions, is unlikely to offer the freedom to pursue different lines of enquiry afforded by semi-structured interviews. Second, while a questionnaire would have collected data from a larger sample, it would have lost the nuances of individual experiences that I set out to gather. The analysis would have been cross-sectional, making it harder to identify personal experiences which were meaningful to the participants.

As discussed in Part 2, I could have used focus groups to collect data from adoptive parents. I felt that the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed might lead to hesitation to share experiences in front of others. It would also have been challenging to recreate the breadth and depth of data gathered in a 1-1 ½ hour interview (amounting to around 8 hours of data between all participants) in the duration of a typical focus group session.

3.2.3   *Semi-structured interviews*

I thoroughly enjoyed conducting the interviews. I had not used any kind of interview techniques in my previous research activities (although my consultation work as a TEP has helped to develop my active listening skills which I put to good use during the interviews). I was reasonably anxious before conducting each interview but soon settled into them. The interview schedule I prepared was useful and reduced my anxiety about maintaining the 'flow' of conversation. On reflection, my interview technique was far from perfect. In the future, I would aim to give interviewees even more space for reflection, rather than rushing to the next question to avoid an awkward silence.

There were some drawbacks to using semi-structured interviews. They are time-consuming, for both researcher and participant. To encourage participation, I offered to meet participants in their locality, and this involved a large amount of travelling for four out of six of the interviews. The semi-structured approach also meant that each interview could be very different from the others, making the task of data analysis and looking for commonalities unwieldy. Extended interviews also produce

a large amount of data, which has implications for the time needed to transcribe and analyse everything.

3.3 Selection and recruitment of participants

3.3.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

I was aware that I needed to create a tight set of criteria to obtain an idiographic sample, in line with the principles of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). However, on reflection, the age range of the participants' children was relatively broad, meaning that the experiences they described were quite different depending on whether their child was at the lower or upper end of primary school. It may have been better to specify a key stage. However, this may have made it harder to recruit the number of participants I was seeking and would have reduced the generalisability of the findings even further.

3.3.2 Recruitment

Recruitment for this research was relatively straightforward. Once I had gained ethical approval from the university and gatekeeper permission from Adoption UK, they advertised the study online, and I received several emails from parents over the next few days. Others heard about the study through word of mouth from existing participants. I was pleased that the participants represented a geographical spread, although as discussed above, this meant extensive travel around the UK.

3.4 Data collection

I ensured that the participants were fully informed about the study before they gave consent to participate. I reminded them of their right to withdraw during the interview, and at any point until transcription.

I did not conduct a formal pilot interview. Instead, I spent reflected after each interview on how to improve my interviewing skills during the subsequent interviews (particularly after the first one). I feel that these gradual improvements in technique are reflected in the transcripts. The first interview was particularly formative. However, conducting a pilot interview would have allowed me to refine my skills and

gather feedback from the participant about my techniques (Robson & McCartan, 2016) as well as increasing my confidence going into the first interview.

I worked with my supervisor to construct a loose schedule of topics to cover during each interview (see Appendix H). I needed to gather some demographic information from the participants, so I began each interview with a set of questions about them and their family. After that, I asked about their experiences of choosing a primary school for their children. I then followed the natural flow of conversation, which in some cases followed the participant's child's journey through school, but in other instances jumped around between different topics. I often asked participants to "tell me more about that" or "how did you feel then" to try and elicit more abundant pictures of their experiences. I did not stick rigidly to the schedule but tried to cover most of the points.

I was concerned before the interviews that my position as a TEP might mean that participants saw me as a representative of a local authority and adjust their responses accordingly. However, my recruitment materials made it clear that I was a researcher, and it was not apparent during the interviews that the participants constructed me as being involved with the systems they were discussing.

The threat of the 'triple hermeneutic' (discussed in Part 2) was ever-present as I conducted the interviews. To avoid it, when participants spoke about their child's experiences, I tried to ask how they had felt during that time, or what their memories of that time were. There are undoubtedly instances of the triple hermeneutic scattered throughout the transcripts. I aimed to remain alert to this during data analysis and make it clear when a participant was talking about an incident which they did not directly experience.

3.5 Data analysis

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) stated that the role of the IPA researcher during analysis is to attempt to understand how the participant is making sense of their lived experiences. IPA was a good match for the exploratory nature of the data

because it does not involve testing a directional hypothesis but involves analysing the data for emergent themes, and then looking for commonalities and differences between the participants.

The data analysis phase involved repeated readings of the transcripts and extensive note-making, following the procedure suggested by Smith et al. (2009). This was time-consuming and demanding work which tested my stamina and resilience as a researcher. However, it was essential to become immersed in the data. I attempted to bracket my experiences, preconceptions and expectations during analysis (Finlay, 2008), which was challenging given my familial involvement with adoption. It was hard to remain neutral when some of the accounts given were so emotionally powerful. I tried to balance interpretation with staying close to the voices of my participants, a goal I feel I mostly achieved. It would have been useful to revisit the participant post-analysis to see if they agreed with my construction of the final themes, but I ran out of time to do so.

I also considered whether to use thematic analysis instead of IPA to analyse my interview data. My supervisor advised delaying the final decision until I had conducted a few interviews. Following the second interview, we examined the data together and were satisfied that it was phenomenological and interpretative enough to justify the use of IPA. A key characteristic of my data was that the participants were talking about their lived experiences and how they made sense of them, rather than talking descriptively. This gave me confidence that IPA was appropriate.

My first attempt at reporting my findings in Part Two read more like a list of loosely connected quotes and did not reflect the journeys and depth of emotion that the participants shared. I subsequently spent a long time working on making the findings section more connected and reflective of my interpretations. I am now proud of how this section represents the compelling lived experiences shared by participants.

3.6   Ethical considerations

Compared to my previous research experiences, the process of gaining ethical approval for this research was relatively smooth, with the university ethics committee only asking for minor amendments to the proposed study. This research raised several ethical considerations, which are discussed in detail in Appendix K.

The use of an IPA framework raised ethical considerations that may not have been raised by alternative methodologies. For example, face-to-face interviews meant that I knew the identity of my participants, which would not have been the case if I had used online questionnaires to gather the data. This also meant that extra steps needed to be taken to anonymise the data, such as removing names, locations and other identifying information from the transcripts.

I also needed to consider the impact of my interviews on the participants. Due to the emotive nature of the topics being discussed, some of the participants became upset at various points as they spoke. When this occurred, I checked if they would like to take a break or stop the interview altogether. None of them took these options, and on reflection I feel that I acted responsibly by giving them the choice. Following the interviews, I sat with each participant for a short time and made sure that I left them in a similar emotional state to the one they had been in prior to the interview. I also emphasised the information on the debrief sheet about seeking support following the interview. All the participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be interviewed, suggesting that they felt positive about their involvement. I gave all participants the opportunity to receive a copy of their transcript, but only one participant requested it.

3.7   Researcher's position

I was highly aware throughout the entire research process that I may have embarked on this project with a biased impression of how adoptive families and schools interact. This was based on my casework experiences, my familial experiences, and my reading of the existing literature. In some ways, I was probably expecting to hear negative stories and may have inadvertently indicated this to my participants. I was

caught off-guard when my first participant had mostly positive things to say about how schools had supported her son. My surprise at her positive account is proof that I had entered the interview with an inherent assumption about what participants were going to say. This highlights the importance of being both reflective and reflexive when carrying out research in-person. My inherent bias likely affected my interpretation of the data, despite attempts at bracketing. It is acknowledged that a lack of triangulation with the participants or other researchers is a limitation of this research.

I intended to ask open-ended and non-directive questions. However, as a novice researcher, I regularly fell into the trap of asking what could be perceived as leading questions. I was particularly aware of this following the second interview and made a concerted effort to avoid doing so in the subsequent interviews. Part of the reason I found it hard to remain neutral was that I felt tremendous empathy towards the participants. Some of the things they spoke about were distressing and heart-wrenching, and so I naturally felt the need to respond in a way that recognised their emotions and demonstrated my empathy with them. This undoubtedly introduced bias into my data (including several examples in the first interview where the participant repeated word-for-word several things that I said). However, it would have been wrong to remain unresponsive and emotionless, and my responses helped build rapport and trust with the participants. This is certainly something that I will reflect on and consider how to approach differently in future research.

4   Contribution to knowledge

4.1   Contributions of research findings to existing knowledge

The study presented in Part Two identified six superordinate themes from adoptive parents' experiences of interacting with schools. These were: 'Every school is different'; 'Transitions'; 'Parents taking action'; 'Learning'; 'The power of people'; and 'IMPACT!'. I found it useful to consider how these themes reflect adoptive parents' position within multi-layered and interacting systems (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The experiences shared by the participants in this study demonstrated the complex relationships between home and school, with difficulties in one domain spilling over into the other. While much adoption research has looked at within-child factors, this research 'zoomed out' and considered the parental perspective.

This study allowed adoptive parents to talk in detail about their lived experiences, and the use of IPA was (as far as I can tell) a novel approach to investigating this area. Thus, the findings are different from existing research and represent a new way of thinking about adoptive parents' experiences.

Many of the current study's findings reflected those of previous studies, as outlined in the discussion section of Part 2. Other researchers had also highlighted many of the points raised by participants in this study. Where the present study differed was that I, as the researcher, interpreted what the participants said, rather than just reporting their experiences directly. The data collection method was open and flexible, giving participants the freedom to talk about the issues that mattered to them, in contrast to previous research which has used more structured and restrictive data collection methods.

I hope that adoptive parents will consider the findings of this research relevant and useful. The aim was to give a voice to adoptive parents, and in doing so, validate their interpretations of their experiences with schools. A further goal was to highlight to schools that adopted children are likely to continue to need support following adoption, in other words, that adoption is not a magic wand that will instantly

reverse the impact of pre-adoption adversity. Several participants spoke of feeling isolated due to their experiences with schools, so I hope that this research shines a light on the need for schools to establish and nurture positive relationships with adoptive families to deliver the best possible support for adopted pupils.

The findings from this research could be further developed by considering how best to support schools in identifying and meeting the needs of adopted pupils. Staff training is vital to increase knowledge of adoption-related issues, as is working with individual members of staff to reframe their constructions and expectation of adopted pupils. However, this represents a rather piecemeal approach to improving the situation, so perhaps it would be better to think about how to achieve this at a more systemic level. This could be through including adoption-related issues in initial teacher training, and through other professionals such as EPs helping to make schools aware of the resources available to them such as the Adoption Support Fund and virtual schools.

While my research was based on the experiences of only six adoptive parents, which limits the generalisability of the findings, parallels with previous research suggests that at least some of the present findings may be relevant to the broader population of adoptive families.

4.2 Contributions to future research

A potential way of developing this research in the future would be to capture the voices of adopted children themselves and explore their experiences in greater depth. They are in a strong position to talk about their own school experiences. They may also be able to offer unique insights that their parents are unable to, simply because they do not share everything that happens to them at school with their parents. This would also act as a point of triangulation for the current research and previous research by Stewart (2017) exploring the experiences and attitudes of teachers working with adopted pupils. Smith et al. (2009) advocate the use of IPA to explore the same topic from different viewpoints, to provide a well-rounded appreciation of how people in different positions make sense of what is happening.

This research only included parents who had a child of primary school age, so it would be interesting for future research to investigate how the experiences of adoptive parents change as their children move into secondary education. Several participants in this study highlighted the transition to secondary school as a source of anxiety, so it would be useful to know more about whether their worries come to fruition, and how well they feel secondary schools support their children. Again, it would also be interesting to gather the views and experiences of secondary-aged adopted children.

One of the participants in this study had withdrawn her children from school due to escalating issues and was educating them at home, and she spoke about the implications of doing so, both for her children and for herself. Other research has highlighted the small population of adoptive families who decide (or are compelled) to home educate (Adoption UK, 2019) but not much is yet known about their exact reasons for doing so. It could be useful to replicate this study with just home educating adoptive parents to find out more about the specific experiences with schools that lead to their decision to withdraw their children from maintained education.

4.3 Dissemination

I would like to pursue publication of this research as a journal article, as I believe that the findings could be relevant and useful to a range of professionals including educational psychologists, school staff, social workers and adoptive families. My review of the literature demonstrated that research about adoption is relevant to professionals across multiple domains, so I would be keen to submit the study to academic journals beyond the field of educational psychology.

To reach adoptive families, I could approach organisations such as Adoption UK and ask them to help disseminate my findings, through their website and through their regular printed publications sent to members, in the form of a poster or leaflet. This

would perhaps help other adoptive parents who have had similar experiences with schools to feel validated and empowered.

A key finding of this and other research is that school staff need support to understand adoption-related issues. I would, therefore, be keen for as many school staff members as possible to find out about this research. This could perhaps be achieved by disseminating the findings through training for SENCos/ALNCos, who could then share the implications with the broader school community. I could also disseminate my findings using social media platforms such as Twitter, where EPs and teachers often share and discuss research findings.

4.4 Relevance to EP practice

As an EP about to qualify, I hope to carry forward my learning from this research into my post-qualification practice in several ways. First, although I was already aware of the importance of listening to and valuing parental perspectives, carrying out this research has reinforced the importance of ensuring that parents have every opportunity to share their unique and valuable insights on their children. I have come to understand that parents are experts on their children, but that schools do not always recognise or value their expertise and may even occasionally feel threatened by it. Part of my job as an EP is to facilitate communication between schools and families and avoid a closing-down of communication when a situation becomes complicated.

Second, carrying out this research has also bolstered my understanding of attachment, trauma and the ongoing needs of adopted children. I feel better equipped to support school staff in their knowledge of adoption-related issues. While I would always aim to avoid taking on the role of the expert, it will be useful going forward to be able to empower other professionals by sharing information and knowledge gained through this research process. This knowledge will also enhance my attempts at reframing constructions which may be based on misconceptions about adoption.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Search terms used for literature review

Appendix B - Table of key studies

Appendix C - Information on attachment theory

Appendix D - Gatekeeper letter

Appendix E - Recruitment poster

Appendix F - Participant information sheet

Appendix G - Consent form for participants

Appendix H - Semi-structured interview schedule

Appendix I - Participant debrief sheet

Appendix J - Data analysis procedure (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis)

Appendix K - Ethical considerations

Appendix L - All quotes organised by theme

Appendix M - Validity of qualitative research

Appendix N - Explanation of aspects of bioecological systems model in relation to the current study

Appendix O - Example of transcript for Participant 2 (Mary) with exploratory comments

Appendix P - Example of transcript for Participant 4 (Karen) with exploratory comments

Appendix Q - Superordinate and subordinate themes for all participants, with the emergent themes underlying them

Appendix R – Extracts from research diary

Due to their size, the complete transcripts have been submitted separately.

Appendix A – Search terms used for literature review

Database	Search terms (capitals indicate subject headings)	Number of results
PsycInfo	ADOPTED CHILDREN OR ADOPTION (CHILD) OR ADOPTIVE PARENTS AND SCHOOLS OR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OR HIGH SCHOOLS OR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS OR MIDDLE SCHOOLS OR NURSERY SCHOOLS OR EDUCATION OR TEACHING OR TEACHERS	295
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	mainsubject.Exact("adoption process" OR "adoption" OR "adopted children" OR "adoptive parents") AND mainsubject.Exact("school" OR "education" OR "teacher")	12
British Education Index	adopted AND children AND school	8
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	adopted AND children AND school	48
Scopus	"adopted children" OR "adoptive parents" AND school* OR educat*	578

Appendix B – Table of key studies

Author	Title	Location	Type	Participants	Technique	Outcome
Adoption UK (2019a)	The Adoption Barometer	UK	Cross-sectional study	3,500 adoptive parents from across the UK	Questionnaire (online)	Education was highlighted as an area of concern. 80% of respondents felt that their child needs more support in school than their peers. Rates of diagnosis of ASD, ADHD were much higher for adopted children, as well as prevalence of social, emotional or mental health needs. Rates of exclusion were 20 times higher. 71% agreed that their child's teacher listened to them and respected their knowledge. 80% of home educating adoptive families would prefer their child to be in school.
Brown, Waters and Shelton (2019)	The educational aspirations and psychological well-being of adopted young people in the UK	UK	Cross-sectional study	58 adoptive families	Questionnaire (postal survey)	Parents felt their child's educational needs increased as they got older, as did the level of classroom support that they received. Two main themes were drawn from the data: advocacy (parents reported a strong sense of advocacy for their child's adoption-specific needs in school) and family cohesion (the feeling that school experiences impacted on the development of the family unit).

Dingwall and Sebba (2018)	Evaluation of The Attachment Aware Schools Programme: Final Report	England	Programme evaluation	40 members of staff from 4 schools, and some pupils	Surveys, interviews Analysis of pupil attendance and attainment data	Found evidence that training school staff on the Attachment Aware Schools Programme had a positive impact on their understanding of attachment/ Participants reported greater confidence, knowledge and understanding. They described changes in their practice and reported that the school environment was calmer and more nurturing. Some schools reported improvements in attendance and attainment, though it was not possible to directly attribute this to the programme. Pupils reported noticing a change in the school atmosphere.
Estyn (2020)	Knowing your children – supporting pupils with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)	Wales	Best practice report	Visits were made to 11 primary schools, 2 all-age schools, 9 secondary schools. 19 Welsh local authorities completed the survey.	Case studies, survey	Understanding of the impact of ACEs has improved among school staff. Many schools have adopted a whole-school approach to supporting vulnerable pupils. Examples of best practice include establishing trusting and non-judgemental relationships with families; providing staff training; and providing a safe and nurturing environment in school. Primary schools tend to be better at getting to know families than secondaries, and secondary pupils reported that not all their teachers knew how to support them. This may be due to reduced contact time between pupils and teachers at secondary level.
Fancourt (2019)	Looked after children: Embedding attachment	England	Intervention evaluation	102 teachers from 25 schools in one local authority	Analysis of school data Surveys	Found that delivering attachment awareness training had a positive impact on whole staff understanding of attachment theory. Teachers and staff reported the largest impact. while impact on pupils was harder to gauge. A key

					Interviews	finding was the importance of senior leader commitment to ensuring that training is imbedded into practice.
Goldberg, Frost and Black (2017)	"There is so much to consider": School-related decisions and experiences among families who adopt noninfant children	USA	Qualitative study	32 adoptive parents (in 18 couples)	Telephone interviews	School decisions for adoptive parents are often based on practical factors (e.g. cost and location) and the specific needs of their children (e.g. history, diagnoses). These factors were more important when choosing schools than other factors such as race and family make-up. Participants reported significant challenges in obtaining appropriate support for their children from schools. The authors recommend a collaborative approach from schools and parents to support trauma-experienced adopted children.
Golding (2010)	Multi-agency and specialist working to meet the mental health needs of children in care and adopted	UK	Review of existing research, and recommendations for professional practice	N/A	Literature review Case studies	Care-experienced children are at greater risk of having complex mental health needs that are not usually well met by mental health services. The author presents evidence of integrated and dedicated mental health services for care-experienced children and recognises that adopted children should not be left out. The author also reports on the barriers to achieving this, which for adoptive families included: mental health professionals not recognising the extent of parenting challenges leading to parents feeling blamed; and adoptive children masking their needs therefore not being identified. The author also suggest that multi-agency work needs to include adoptive families more effectively.

Gore Langton (2017)	Adopted and permanently placed children in education: from rainbows to reality	UK	Review of existing research	N/A	Literature review	Many schools and local authorities view adoption as a "happy ending" for vulnerable children and are therefore less likely to be aware of the ongoing needs of adopted children. Evidence suggests that the impact of early trauma is pervasive for a many years post-adoption. Many adoptive families report difficulties in getting the right kind of support. The author reports that EPSs have a key role to play in support adopted children and their families. Some of the avenues through which this could be achieved are identified, including training, consultation, assessment, intervention and research,
Osborne, Norgate and Traill (2009)	The role of the educational psychologist in multidisciplinary work relating to fostering and adoption	England	Qualitative study	88 educational psychologists from 84 local authorities in England	Questionnaire	69% of respondents were involved in working with fostered and adopted children, although they were more likely to work with fostered children than adopted. The type of work carried out included consultation, providing training and support to school staff, and work relating to fostering and adoption panels. Some EPs reported undertaking multi-agency work concerning care-experienced children, although some also reported that this was not always effective due to time pressures and lack of opportunity to meet with colleagues from other disciplines.
Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010)	Adoption research: trends, topics, outcomes	USA	Review of existing research	N/A	Literature review	The authors conducted a wide-ranging review of historical research into adoption. They found three trends in adoption research: 1. a focus on differences in adjustment between adopted and non-adopted children.

						2. investigation of adopted children's propensity to recover from adversity. 3. a focus on biological, psychosocial and contextual factors which may impact upon the development of adopted children. The authors also highlight a need for further research in the areas of resilience theory, the impact of adoptee's adjustment on the quality of family relationships, and attachment processes.
Selwyn and Meakings (2017)	Beyond the Adoption Order (Wales): Discord and disruption in adoptive families	Wales	Report to government	20 adoptive parents from 11 local authorities in Wales	Semi-structured interviews Questionnaires	Reported on the devasting impact of adoption disruption. It was also reported that adopted children's foster care experiences were often negative and were characterised by a lack of nurture and constant disruption and/or loss. Participants reported difficulty accessing support from local authorities. They also reported that many of the professional they encountered lacked a basic understanding of early trauma and adversity. A surprisingly high prevalence of child-to-parent violence was reported.
Sempowicz, Howard, Tambyah and Carrington (2018)	Identifying obstacles and opportunities for inclusion in the school curriculum for children adopted to overseas: developmental	Australia	Mixed-methods study	7 adoption support personnel, 18 adoptive parents	Focus group interviews (one with adoption support personnel, three with adoptive parents) Case studies	Found a need for greater awareness, understanding and sensitivity in teacher's approach when working with adopted children (in terms of curriculum content). Also highlighted a need for flexibility in teachers' professional agency and discretion in the selection of resources, especially when working with inter-country adoptees.

					Analysis of previously collected data	
and social constructionist perspectives					Analysis of previously collected data	
Stother, Woods and McIntosh (2019)	Evidence-based practice in relation to post-adoption support in educational settings	UK	Review of existing research	N/A	Systematic literature review	Found that there was a limited number of studies looking at post-adoption support in educational settings. Those that existed had questionable methodological qualities. Identified aspects of effective support from 11 studies, which fell under four themes: strategies for support; shared understanding; communication; and monitoring.
Sturgess and Selwyn (2007)	Supporting the placements of children adopted out of care	England	Mixed-methods study	Data on 130 adopted children 54 adoptive parents	Analysis of data from social services department records Interviews with adoptive parents	Found that immediately following adoption, families tended to be supported by social services, but that support later shifted towards Health, Education and CAMHS. Many adoptive parents reported feeling that the support provided was 'too little, too late'. Parents also reported that their children were often assessed, but then did not receive the support required.
Syne, Green and Dyer (2012)	Adoption: The lucky ones or the Cinderellas of care	England	Qualitative study	Parents, SENCos and EPs (total of 19)	Evaluation of LA approach using a questionnaire	Presented a description and evaluation of how one local authority approach supporting adopted children. Specifically, the authors describe how the role of EPs in the LA in supporting adopted children has changed over time. The authors suggest that EPs can provide valuable support to adoptive families as they go on the journey of adoption (i.e. both pre- and post-adoption). A key element of the LA's approach is the use of the Education Plan for Adopted Children (EPAC), a document that

						aims to strengthen the relationship between home and school by improving school's understanding of the pupil's history and needs. Evaluations gathered from key stakeholders suggest a positive impact of social services, education, and families working together in a solution-focused way.
Waid and Alewine (2018)	An exploration of family challenges and service needs during the post-adoption period	USA	Cross-sectional study	238 adoptive families	Analysis of data collected by an adoption support helpline	Concluded that families continue to require support post-adoption, and especially at times of developmental transition, such as entering adolescence. Callers contacting the adoption support helpline were seeking support in a wide range of areas, including child emotional-behavioural challenges; caregiver strain; and school related challenges. The authors state the importance of ensuring that post-adoption services are multifaceted and able to address challenges that occur across multiple domains.
Webber (2017)	A school's journey in creating a relational environment which supports attachment and emotional security	England	Qualitative study	6 members of school staff (Headteacher, SENCo, 3 class teachers and one teaching assistant)	Case study Semi-structured Interviews	One primary school was used as a case study to investigate ways of supporting care-experienced children in school. It was found that the school was beginning to develop a consistent approach to supporting care-experienced children with insecure attachments. Six key elements of this were: • Whole school use of PACE approach; • staff communication, especially around transitions; • use of physical contact to support emotional regulation;

						• bespoke provision on an individual pupil basis; • avoiding shame; and • collaboration with families and other agencies.
Weistra and Luke (2017)	Adoptive parents' experiences of social support and attitudes towards adoption	UK and Ireland	Mixed-methods study	43 adoptive parents	Questionnaire (online) Semi-structured interviews	Found there is ongoing stigmatisation of adoption in the UK and Ireland. 93% of participants agreed that 'people in society do not understand adoptive families'. Family and friends were often unsure of how to react to the news of adoption, which added further stigma. Further findings included widespread public misunderstanding about the backgrounds of adopted children, and the tendency for the participants to seek non-judgemental outlets for their frustrations around parenting. Participants reported relying more on friends for support than family, possibly because they tended to become friends with other supports who were far less likely to add to stigma.
Wyman Battalen, Dow-Fleisner and Brodzinsky (2020)	School responsiveness to adoption among lesbian mothers	USA	Cross-sectional study	1262 adoptive parents (a mixture of lesbian mothers, gay fathers and heterosexual parents)	Questionnaire (online)	37.9% of participants reported that schools had managed adoption-related issues positively, while 31.1% reported the opposite. 21% of parents reported that their child experienced adoption-related teasing in school.

Appendix C – Information on attachment theory

Attachment theory was first explained by British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1953, 1970, 1991, 1998) and remains a dominant theory of social and emotional development in children (Harlow, 2019; Smith, Cameron, & Reimer, 2017). Bowlby suggested that infants have the propensity to form emotional bonds with their caregivers. If this process is disrupted, the child's social and emotional development will be adversely affected (Bowlby, 1970). Attachment relationships are initiated when an adult consistently meets a child's physical needs and are maintained when the adult continues to provide emotional warmth, comfort and security. Bowlby (2005) also described the concept of the secure base – the solid attachment with a primary caregiver from which a child can venture forth for short periods, safe in the knowledge that they can return at any point (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Bowlby (1970) described a critical period for attachment between the ages of six months and two and a half years. He believed that failure to form an attachment relationship during this period would have permanent consequences for a child's development. Bowlby also developed the maternal deprivation hypothesis, a controversial idea suggesting that continual separation from one's mother would lead to long-term consequences such as delinquency and affectionless psychopathy (Bowlby, 1951). This idea has been questioned on the grounds that Bowlby's 'all-or-nothing' ideas about attachment do not account for observed differences in attachment strength and style.

In response, Ainsworth (1964) built on Bowlby's ideas and developed a more nuanced model of attachment, including the concept that different types of early experiences with caregivers result in different styles of attachment. To investigate attachment differences, Ainsworth and Wittig (1969) devised a procedure called the 'Strange Situation'. This involves observing a series of interactions between an infant, their caregiver, and a stranger. The key

moments observed were how the infant reacted when their caregiver left, how they reacted when a stranger tried to comfort them, and how they responded when reunited with their caregiver. Based on the infant's behaviours, Ainsworth and Wittig categorised their attachment into one of three styles: secure, insecure avoidant or insecure ambivalent. A fourth style of attachment, disorganised, was added later by Main and Solomon (1986). Table 7 gives more information.

Table 7 - Attachment styles based on observed infant behaviour (author's own work)

Attachment style	Infant's general presentation	Caregiver's responsiveness to infant's needs	Infant's internalised beliefs
Secure	Secure, explorative, happy.	Quick, sensitive, consistent.	Believes and trusts that his/her needs will be met.
Insecure avoidant	Not very explorative, emotionally distant.	Distant, disengaged.	Subconsciously believes that his/her needs probably will not be met.
Insecure ambivalent	Anxious, insecure, angry.	Inconsistent, sometimes sensitive, sometimes neglectful.	Cannot rely on his/her needs being met.
Disorganised	Depressed, angry, completely passive, non-responsive.	Extreme, erratic, frightened or frightening, passive or intrusive.	Severely confused with no strategy to have his/her needs met.

Attachment behaviour

The way a child behaves towards their attachment figures is based on their earliest experiences of having their needs met (Golding et al., 2013). Both children and caregivers have been observed to engage in 'attachment behaviour', characterised by deliberate attempts from the child to maintain proximity, and the caregiver's recognition of (and response to) these attempts

(Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Geddes, 2006). These interactions form the basis for a secure attachment, and the successful (or otherwise) negotiation of these early exchanges influences what a child learns about themselves and the people around them (Sroufe, 1983). These mental representations are what Bowlby (1991, 1998) and others referred to as an internal working model. For most children, attachment behaviours are only activated occasionally, and cease once their goal has been met, operating in a functional manner. However, when children experience either the absence of their caregiver, or frightening behaviour from their caregiver, their attachment systems are almost constantly activated (West & George, 1999).

The internal working model

The internal working model (IWM) is the internalised set of rules or expectations that a child acquires based on their experiences with caregivers (Bowlby, 1991). Children who have formed secure attachments in the past enter new social encounters expecting an empathetic response from others. Those who experienced inconsistent or adverse caregiving are likely to have formed an IWM in which they have learned that adults can be unreliable or dangerous (Williams, O'Callaghan, & Cowie, 1995). It is thought that early relationships continue to govern most people's social and emotional experiences as they develop (Golding et al., 2013). However, Joseph et al. (2014) found evidence to suggest that the IWM can be altered through subsequent positive relationships. This finding offers hope that children who experience early adversity are perhaps not destined to a lifetime of poor attachments as was previously hypothesised.

Attuned caregivers and containment

When caregivers provide an attuned understanding of their child's emotions and behaviour, they help the child learn to regulate their emotions and feel secure enough to explore the world. Taking a psychoanalytic viewpoint, Bion (1967) described how attuned caregivers provide 'containment' for children who may be overwhelmed by their experiences. When a child expresses

anxiety and desperation, a caregiver who responds in an understanding and comforting way can help a child to 'contain' their anxieties and return to exploring the world.

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Appendix D – Gatekeeper letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a student on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology course at Cardiff University. I am currently undertaking a research project looking into the lived experiences of adoptive parents in relation to their adopted child's education. The title of the project is 'Adoptive parents' views of their children's educational experiences: an interpretative phenomenological analysis'. The purpose of the project is to give adoptive parents an opportunity to talk about how they feel schools meet the needs of their adopted children.

Participation would involve one interview, which would last between one and one and a half hours. The interview would be audio-recorded, then transcribed. The audio recordings would be held confidentially, then deleted after transcription. The transcribed data would be completely anonymous. The data from six interviews will be analysed to look for common themes, and the results will be written up as a doctoral thesis. The final report may potentially be published in academic journals.

In order to participate, volunteers would need to meet the following criteria:

- He/she is the legal adoptive parent of a child who is currently of primary school age in the UK (4-11 years old).
- Adopted his/her child from foster care or residential care in the United Kingdom.
- Finalised the adoption of his/her child at least one year ago.
- His/her adopted child has attended school for at least one full year following adoption.
- Have made their adopted child's school aware of their child's adopted status.
- His/her adopted child is aware that they were adopted.

I am writing to ask for your permission to post information about this study on your website, inviting your members to volunteer to participate. They could then contact me using the provided information should they be interested in participating. Please see the attached participant information sheet for further details of the project.

Thank you for your consideration of this project. Please let me know if you require further information. You can also contact my research supervisor: Andrea Higgins, Programme Co-ordinator of the Doctorate in Educational Psychology programme at Cardiff University.

Regards,

Alice Clarke   Andrea Higgins
Academic Director and Programme Co-ordinator
School of Psychology   School of Psychology
Cardiff University   Cardiff University
70 Park Place   70 Park Place
Cardiff   Cardiff
CF10 3AT   CF10 3AT

This project has been reviewed and ethically approved by the School of Psychology's School Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about this research, please contact:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT

Tel: 029 2087 0360

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix E – Recruitment poster

RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled 'Adoptive parents' views of how schools support their children: an interpretative phenomenological analysis.'. Please read this information sheet carefully to help you decide whether you would like to be involved.

What is the project about?

The purpose of this project is to give adoptive parents an opportunity to discuss how they feel schools have met the needs of their adopted child. The aim of the project is to give educational psychologists a better understanding of how to help schools work with adoptive parents to support adopted children's needs.

Who is running this project?

This project is being carried out by Alice Clarke. She is studying for a Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Cardiff University. Her research supervisor is Andrea Higgins.

Who can participate?

You are invited to participate if you meet all the following criteria:

- You have an adopted child who is currently of primary school age (4-11 years old).
- You finalised the adoption of your child at least one year ago.
- Your child was adopted out of care in the UK.
- Your child has attended school in the UK for at least one full term following their adoption.
- You have made your child's school aware that they are adopted.
- Your child knows that they are adopted.

What would I have to do?

If you agree to participate, you would meet with the researcher at a location convenient to you. This could be at your home, or in a meeting room at Cardiff University, your child's school, or any other public place of your choice. The researcher would ask questions that would take between one and one and a half hours. The questions will cover the following topics:

- Your experience of engaging with your child's school
- What is going well for your child in school
- Any concerns you have about how your child is supported
- The understanding of the adults in school regarding your child's needs
- Support you've received from other professionals or organisations regarding your child's education

Additionally, other topics surrounding adoption and education may come up during the interview. You do not have to answer any questions that you would prefer not to.

The interview would be recorded on an audio recording device. You would be free to stop the interview at any point. The researcher will make an audio recording of the interview.

What would happen after the interview?
The researcher will turn the audio recording of your interview into a written transcript, then delete the audio recording. At this point everything you said will become anonymous. No identifying personal information will remain attached to your interview responses. This includes your name, your child's name, their school, and where you live.

The researcher will then look carefully at the responses you gave during your interview, alongside those given by other participants. This will allow the researcher to look for common themes and find out more about how adoptive parents view the way that schools support their children.

The researcher will write up the research project as part of her doctoral thesis, which will be available for members of the public to read. It is possible that some parts of the research will be published in academic journals in the future. Some direct quotes from your interview may be included in these publications. These would be completely anonymised so that there would be no identifying information that would link to you.

What if I change my mind after agreeing to participate?
Even after you have signed the consent form and taken part in the interview, you have the right to leave the study and have any information you've provided so far destroyed. This is the case up until the researcher has turned your recorded interview into writing. At this point, your responses become anonymous, so it would be impossible to remove your responses specifically.

What will happen to my personal information?
Any personal information you provide on the consent form, or as part of the recruitment process will be held confidentially and securely. This includes your name, email address, home address and telephone number. It will be destroyed securely following the researcher's competition of her doctoral studies in 2020.

How do I volunteer to take part?
If you would like to volunteer to take part in this project, please email the researcher at clarkea14@cardiff.ac.uk. It is possible that the researcher may receive a large number of responses from suitable participants, in which case you may not be randomly selected to take part even if you match the criteria.

I still have questions; how can I find out more?

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact the researcher or her supervisor Andrea Higgins using the contact details below.

Researcher	Supervisor
Alice Clarke	Andrea Higgins
Doctorate in Educational Psychology student	Academic Director and Programme Co-ordinator
School of Psychology	School of Psychology
Cardiff University	Cardiff University
Tower Building	Tower Building
Park Place	Park Place
Cardiff	Cardiff
CF10 3AT	CF10 3AT
Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 5381	Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 9003
Email: clarkea14@cardiff.ac.uk	Email: higginsa2@cardiff.ac.uk
	http://psych.cf.ac.uk/cuchds/

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Tel: 029 2087 0360

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

The data controller is Cardiff University and the Data Protection Officer is Matt Cooper (CooperM1@cardiff.ac.uk). The lawful basis for the processing of the data you provide is consent**.**

Appendix G – Consent form for participants

Thank you for volunteering to take part in the research project entitled 'Adoptive parents' views of how schools support their children: an interpretative phenomenological analysis'.
Please read each of the following statements carefully and tick in the boxes to the right if you agree.

I understand that my participation in this project will involve one interview with the researcher which will last no longer than one and a half hours. I can stop the interview at any point without giving a reason, and I can decline from answering any questions if I want.	
I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. This will remain the case up until the point at which the researcher turns the audio recording of my interview into text.	
I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with the researcher, Alice Clarke or her supervisor, Andrea Higgins.	
I understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study.	
I understand that the research information provided by me will be held totally anonymously, so that it is impossible to trace this information back to me individually. I understand that this information may be retained indefinitely or published.	
I understand that the researcher may use some verbatim quotes from my interview in the report based on of this research project.	

I, _____(NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by Alice Clarke, School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Andrea Higgins.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H – Semi-structured interview schedule

<u>**Basic information**</u>
Participant ID
Child's age
When did you finalise adoption?
Time in care prior to adoption
Siblings
Time in school prior to adoption
School info, name etc

See, Feel, Think, How do you feel about it now?

Could you tell me about when your child started school?
> Choosing a school (what did you feel would be important, visits to the school, how did you come to a decision, did partner agree?), additional support, transition, funding, feelings about school, staff expectation/misconceptions, sources of information and support for parents

How has your child got on at school in general?
> Positive achievements and strengths, what do they enjoy, academic progress, SEN/ALN, SEMH, behaviour, friendships, relationships with staff, additional support, outside agencies

How has your child's school responded to them being adopted?
> Any adjustments made by the school, sensitivity, understanding of needs

Could you tell me about your involvement as a parent with your child's education?
> Communication between home and school, relationships with school staff, responses to any concerns you have raised

Is there anything you think that school staff should be aware of when working with adopted children?
> Training, knowledge/awareness

Do they want to receive:
> transcript of their interview
> full report
> research poster

Appendix I – Participant debrief sheet

Thank you for taking part in the research project entitled 'Adoptive parents' views of how schools support their children: an interpretative phenomenological analysis'.

Here is some more information about the project and how your responses will be used.

Research evidence suggests that adopted children in the UK sometimes experience problems in school. Some children have difficulties with learning or behaviour. This may be in part due their experiences prior to being adopted. Even once they have joined a loving and supportive family, some difficulties may persist. Difficulties may not emerge at all until after the adoption happens. It is important to recognise that these difficulties usually stem from events prior to adoption. They are usually not a reflection of the abilities of adoptive parents or school staff.

Schools in the UK are becoming more aware of the effect that a child's early experiences can have. It is important that staff in schools understand that adopted children may require additional support. Educational psychologists sometimes become involved with adopted children and their families when there are difficulties at school. The project is designed to help us understand more about the experiences of adoptive parents in relation to how schools support their children.

The audio recording of your interview will now be transcribed into a written record within two weeks. The recording will then be deleted. At this point, it will no longer be possible for you to withdraw your responses from this project. The researcher will then look carefully at your responses and those of other participants. The common themes will be reported as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis, which will be available for members of the public to read. Direct quotes from your interview may also be used, but they will be completely anonymised. It is possible that this research project will be reported in academic journals in the future.

Some of the things you have talked about with the researcher today may be upsetting. They may have raised new questions for you about adoption. You may wish to seek further support from the following organisations.

Adoption UK	PAC-UK
Website: https://www.adoptionuk.org Helplines: **England** - 07904 793 974 and 07539 733079 Monday to Thursday 10.00am - 2.30pm and Friday 10.00am - 12.00pm (excluding bank holidays) You can also email AUKhelpline@pac-uk.org	Website: https://www.pac-uk.org Helplines: **London office Advice Line**: 020 7284 5879 Monday, Tuesday & Friday 10.00am-4.00pm Wednesday & Thursday 2.00pm-7.30pm

	Leeds office Advice Line: 0113 230 2100
Wales - 02920 230319 Monday - Friday 10.00am – 2.30pm **Northern Ireland** - 028 9077 5211 Monday to Thursday 10.00am - 4.00pm and Friday 10.00am - 2.30pm **Scotland** - 0131 322 8500 Monday - Friday 10.00am – 2.30pm	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday 10.00am-1.00pm Wednesday 4.00pm-7.00pm

If you have any questions about your participation in this project or wish to withdraw your participation, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher Alice Clarke, or her supervisor Andrea Higgins, using the information below.

Researcher	Supervisor
Alice Clarke Doctorate in Educational Psychology student School of Psychology Cardiff University Tower Building Park Place Cardiff CF10 3AT Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 5381 Email: clarkea14@cardiff.ac.uk	Andrea Higgins Academic Director and Programme Co-ordinator School of Psychology Cardiff University Tower Building Park Place Cardiff CF10 3AT Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 9003 Email: higginsa2@cardiff.ac.uk http://psych.cf.ac.uk/cuchds/

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Appendix J – Data analysis procedure (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis)

The following analysis procedure was used, based on the structure provided by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009).

Transcription
The researcher listened to each recorded interview repeatedly as she transcribed them. This allowed her to become familiar with the inflections, nuances and tone used by each participant at different points in the interviews. This would affect how she interpreted certain statements later on in the process. The participant used automatic transcription software for the final three interviews, but still had to go through each interview line-by-line to check for accuracy. This meant that immersion in the data was not sacrificed by using assistive transcription software.

Reading and re-reading
The researcher began by reading the transcript of the first interview. She read it several times.

Initial noting
While reading and re-reading the first interview, the researcher made notes about her instinctive reactions to, and interpretations of, the transcript. She made these notes in three colours according to whether they concerned language, concepts, or description what the participant had said. The researcher also underlined interesting passages of text in the same colours. See Appendices J and L for examples of initial notes int eh right hand column of the page.

Developing emergent themes
The researcher reviewed her initial notes on the first transcript and attempted to organise them into a set of emergent themes.

Searching for connections
The researcher began to sift and sort the emergent themes to find some connections between theme. This included four different activities:
- abstraction – collecting similar emergent themes together.
- polarisation – combining themes which highlighted difference (e.g. Supportive Professionals and Unsupportive Professionals).
- contextualisation – exploring the temporal and narrative nature of the themes.
- numeration – paying attention to how common a theme was.

Moving on the next case
The researcher then repeated the preceding steps with the five remaining transcripts. Further emergent themes were collected and assimilated into previous subordinate/superordinate themes where appropriate.

Looking for patterns across cases
Once all six transcripts had been analysed, the researcher attempted to discover commonalities and contrasts across all six cases. It was deemed important to recognise the individuality of each case, while noting concepts that seemed to re-occur for multiple participants.

Appendix K – Ethical considerations

Gatekeeper consent - A gatekeeper email was sent to two adoption charities in the UK, Adoption UK and PAC-UK. This email explained the aims, scope and methodology of the research.

Participant consent - Potential participants emailed the researcher to express their interest. At this stage they were emailed the information sheet (Appendix F). If they were happy to proceed, an interview was arranged. At the start of the interview, they were once again given the information sheet and asked to indicate their informed consent to participate by ticking the statements on the consent form (Appendix G) and signing it.

Confidentiality and Anonymity – The interviews were recorder on a digital recording device, which was stored securely until all the interviews had been transcribed and the original audio files deleted (fourteen days after each interview took place). During the transcription process, all identifying information was removed, and each participant was given a pseudonym. The data became anonymous at that point. The anonymised transcripts are currently stored on a password-protected computer and will be deleted after five years. Paper consent forms are stored in a locked filing cabinet and will be destroyed after five years. As part of giving informed consent, participants were asked to agree to the inclusion of anonymised verbatim extracts from their interview in any publications arising from the project.

Data protection and compliance with GDPR – This study involved collecting personal information from participants. The way this was done complied with GDPR regulations and the processes involved were approved by the Cardiff University School of Psychology Ethics Committee. Participants were informed about how their personal data would be held in the information sheet (Appendix F), consent form (Appendix G) and debrief sheet (Appendix H).

Potential to cause distress – Participants were informed about the topics likely to be discussed in the interview before they gave consent to participant. Participants were reminded verbally at the start of the interview that they could stop at any time. Several participants became emotional when describing their/their child's experiences and were offered the opportunity to pause/stop the interview. None of them wished to do so. The researcher stayed with each participant for a time following each interview, to make sure that they were feeling emotionally stable, and in a similar state to the beginning of the interview. This also gave the participant time to ask any follow-up questions they might have about the research. The debrief sheet contained information about sources of support which participants could access following the interview.

Right to withdraw – Participants were informed that they could withdraw their participation in the project at any point up until the audio recording of their interview had been transcribed. At that point the data became anonymous, so it would not be possible to remove their specific data from the overall data set. None of the participants exercised their right to withdraw.

Debriefing – At the end of each interview, the researcher gave each participant a debrief sheet (Appendix I). This contained information about what would happen to their data next, and how to access support should they need it. It also contained information about how to contact the researcher with any queries.

Appendix L – All quotes organised by theme

Subordinate theme	Ppt, page and line ref	Quotes
		IMPACT!
Emotional IMPACT!	2-46-321	So instead of shaming him and making him miss breaktime, which used to drive me mad, they were always doing that, you know, just take him aside, you know, I can see that you're struggling a bit with this [Son A], or let's sit and do this for a minute, or can you come and help me with this. That didn't happen.
	2-50-424	…there was so many incidents where I was being, at the end of the day I was being called up in front of everyone which is really shaming for [Son A].
	2-50-457	[following an episode when she had been spoken to by a TA about Son A's behaviour after school] Um, she was, it was just awful. I can't remember everything that she'd said but we walked down the steps and for the first time at school, [Son A] just lay on the floor and went berserk.
	2-55-579	It was like a blame thing! It was crazy.
	2-72-1022	I think there was so much shaming that went on at school. And, but now he's frightened of doing schoolwork, um, and he just, yeah. I think what happened to him was appalling.
	3-76-48	…she… kept having problems with a particular girl. Um, her, her behaviour wasn't great anyway because she's a child that's been through trauma, um, so she was biting and hitting and punching and stuff, so it was kind of awkward for me. So I decided to move her from [School X].
	3-77-67	Honestly, I had to tell everybody my children were adopted because of the problems that they were having, and it was basically forced upon us by the headteacher to let everybody know, because she felt like she couldn't hide it from anybody anymore, because people were complaining.
	3-82-210	I would be called in several times, erm, in front of other parents you know, oh [Daughter A] had a bad day today, she hit so and so.
	3-95-555	There was a bit of, Mummy I've got a bad stomach, I don't want to go to school. 'Cause obviously she'd destroyed other people's work and people were gonna be upset and cross with her

	3-106-850	They'd have to take her away from me, going upstairs, going leave me alone, leave me f-ing alone. I don't f-ing like you, and you know, there's other parents and teachers and kids all around while they're dragging my child up the stairs…
	4-122-314	You tell him off and he just shuts down. So you can't have that sort of conversation with him because he doesn't hear it. So as soon as his anxiety levels are raised, you can't, you can't have a conversation with him. So I think by telling him off, they'd have been better off just explaining why, why it wasn't a good thing, you know.
	4-124-384	… she would stand on the door and go, um, Fred's mum - not a good day today! In front of all the waiting parents.
	4-125-397	So the implication is then you're rubbish parent cause of, you know, we don't have any problems in school 'cause he's really good.
	4-133-603	So it really made out then, it really looked like we were really bad parents, you know.
	4-153-1177	[following son making a false allegation and headteacher making a safeguarding referral] I felt like a really, really bad parent. He'd been, he's been removed from one set of parents. And I'm not saying I'm a perfect parent, but there's no way I would hurt him.
	4-162-1407	He doesn't get told off very often, but when he does, yeah, it's incredible 'cause I'd came out from, um, I can see him now stood at the steps coming down and his head's like this because he'd been told off and he was like, and it was, it was like alright. And then his teacher said, oh, he'd been told off or whatever and he was awful. And he still is 'cause he will come up tonight cause there'll be the, the shame of being called into the Head's office, um, and having to speak to her…
	5-173-97	And they would get us in to talk to us. And [partner] and I just went into this shame state, it's like, why is my child behaving like this?
	5-177-203	… they'd come out and tell me, when it started, they'd come out every day and give me some tale of woe… Oh, it was just absolutely dreadful. Dreadful. Because it's so shaming in front of the other mothers. And actually, I didn't respond well.
	5-192-582	As soon as he's done something wrong, he feels so ashamed he can't stop himself doing it. So you have to be there to save him. So it's very, it is tricky.

	5-204-892	And I'm like, well he does care. He cares intensely. And that is a shaming place for him. I mean basically what he was saying is that school is not set up to deal with children like this 'cause they can't catch them because as soon as [son] has gone into a shame position, he cannot come out of it. He digs in his heels and nothing will make it come out of it.
	6-241-228	I think it just reinforced that we must be doing something wrong, which is the place we've got ourselves into anyway. That we were bad parents. That somehow we were doing something that was wrong.
	6-254-581	Um, a couple of playground incidents, um, that he's been absolutely mortified about, that they happened, that he sort of let his guard down. Um, so when they then talked with him and of course, for [Son B] shame is quite a big thing so the minute you then say, well we need to come and talk about this, he melts into a corner because, you know, that's just awful, that someone's even noticed it happening.
	1-12-298	Um, I have some slightly jealous colleagues who've moved into the area, because I've managed to get my son into a local school [laughter].
	2-60-711	And usually, I'll try and find out what they're doing, but because of everything that had been going on I hadn't. I'd usually read the book and find out [what the class was learning about].
	4-113-73	So he got in, even though we live out of county and all the rest of it, he got in and 11 children didn't. I did feel guilty at the time. I don't anymore [laughter].
	4-123-363	I didn't realise, to be honest, I feel awful about it now, how stressful he found school because you don't know what's going on do you? I had no idea what's going on between sort of nine and three. He wasn't good at telling me. looking back now, I feel really guilty for not realising quite how stressful he found school and how he finds school now.
	4-127-443	… I don't think I was as vigilant and on top of things then as I am now…
	4-127-454	So we left it. But yeah, hindsight is a great thing, I should never - I should have moved him. I should've gone in, complained, had him moved to the different, to another class.
	4-150-1077	'Cause it makes me feel like I'm failing [son]. You know, cause I'm not getting him what he needs.
	5-175-141	…and I still feel very badly about that nursery. Um, and well, we shouldn't have sent him so much. Should've been at home... doing stuff with us, but we thought we were doing the right thing.
	5-180-275	I did all the wrong things. I'm mean I shouldn't have let him go to the park, but I shouldn't have got cross with him. I got cross with him.

	1-22-534	But we didn't want to inflict two of them on Reception, because it was an open plan Reception at his previous school, they were two-form entry, they trigger each other [laughter]. [referring to her nephew who is also adopted and has ALN].
	1-22-553	And, the trouble is when he starts to struggle, he starts, he retreats to being an animal and making lots of noise so which of course is a big dis-, not good for the other children.
	2-48-372	[sigh] They said the right things in the meeting but then didn't do anything after the meetings.
	2-48-381	… then when it came to the meeting, Mrs XXX wasn't in it, they said oh no, she's busy with something else. And I thought that was a bit odd, because I thought that was why we'd waited so long. So I thought did she even know about the meeting. I don't know.
	2-58-661	[sigh] I would have liked them to have taken us seriously from the start, and not just nodded along and given us the right answers.
	3-84-257	… because she wasn't at school age, they didn't have to keep her full time, because her birthday's in April, they were using that a lot.
	3-102-728	… they said, well in a couple of weeks the building work will be completed and those children will be gone, um, so we accepted it and we moved on, and a couple of weeks later they were moved, but yet the problem was still there.
	4-128-493	… I remember having a conversation with the IRO, I'm pointing to that chair 'cause that's where she was sitting and saying, this child needs some help. And she kept saying, no, no it's early days. And we were saying, right, well we've got concerns about this, that and the other and like, well, it's early days. And I said to her, well, when's not early days? Five years in? 10 years in? Oh, it's just early days.
	4-133-614	'cause I said to her when, when she said he was like in green group at something like parent's evening. And I was like, oh well he was in, he was red group last year. And she was like, Oh, was he? And I was like, yeah. Um, oh well the work gets harder see in Year 1. And you know, when you think...
	4-147-1008	At the moment I think it's lip service, but if they don't give me an ed psych thingy in September, then I will go berserk. And I will be contacting MPs and everything else because it's just...
	4-167-1564	I think they're telling me what they think I want to hear…

	5-205-922	… we said all along that [son] needs a statement and they've said all along, he doesn't need one. He doesn't need to statement. And now it's like, he needs a statement. He needs one now. And… okay, well they're really hard to get now because now that the funding's been cut, everybody's going for statements.
	5-206-957	… what they collude with is a part of us wants to believe everything's going to be okay. So as soon as somebody says, oh, that's not necessary we go, oh fine, we live to fight another day.
	5-207-970	I think we are far too reasonable, far too nice. The school know that we will do lots of heavy lifting.
	6-251-509	But yes, I do think those families that shout loudest get heard often. But that's just to shut them up because the school didn't know what to do with it.
	2-53-525	But the Head said, if there's one piece of advice I can give you, it would be this. And I could feel my face clenching. She said her father had had, um, a type of schizophrenia that was hereditary, and her daughter when she was young had started displaying certain behaviours, so she'd taken her to the doctor. The doctor had said, just treat her normally as though there's nothing wrong. So she said, that's the best advice I could give you [sigh].
	2-54-536	And the Emotional Well-being Officer teacher came up to me and she said, um, I just want to say, I just want to give you some advice. If you keep talking to other parents, she said I know, she said I have three boys, and I know they don't have the background yours have, but I think you'll find that most of this behaviour is just normal behaviour.
	2-70-971	The lady from CAMHS, she had said I think we need to work towards getting you the right support if you go back into school. And I thought no, this is my child, that's not for you to tell me that. You can ask me if that's something I might want to do, but why…
	3-90-429	I think I can tell the difference between terrible twos and some child that's traumatised.
	3-93-521	… the teacher says she just wants to be loved. And I say, I know! Don't you think I know it, I'm bringing up two of them, you've got 30 of them in your classroom, and there's this one little child that's fighting all 29 other children for your attention, and she will do all she can to get it.
	4-126-420	… the TA was full of good advice about, you know, not giving him his Kindle and if he was violent, taking his Kindle off him and all the rest of it.

	4-154-1198	And at the end of that meeting she said to me, um, oh the thing is [respondent], I s- I know what I'm, I see what he's like in school and I can see what he's like with you. And he gets away with murder with you. And I was like, I'm a safe person. You don't see the real [son]. I keep saying that to them.
	5-229-1581	And he [headteacher] said to me to, do you shout at [son]? And I said, of course I shout at him. He's really annoying! And he said, well I always feel better if I don't shout at my kids. And I'm like, yeah, well, try living with [son]. Try living with somebody whose life depends on not doing what you're asking them to do because they're so anxious, they can't, they can't do anything.
	2-44-283	We had asked for that at school, and in the initial meeting, they said, we'd asked about the people around the child, to put a team around, which they said they would do. Um, and I had said you know if someone can just greet him in the morning, you know, morning [Son A], this is what we're doing today. And they said that that was happening. I found out later down the line when we let them into school in the morning, someone was stood at the door and see all the kids in, they just meant it was this person. It's like no-oo-oo! That's not what I meant!
	2-46-331	I asked if he could bring some things from home, and they said well we'll make a little box and do that with the Emotional Well-being Officer and he can put some things in, which, he selected his things really carefully and took those in, but then I found out they wouldn't let him take them! They wouldn't let him use them! … What's the use of that? It's there for him to help regulate himself and feel safe!
	2-53-509	Well they made an attempt to do the Team Around the Child, but that was just a half-hearted, I don't expect, I don't think for one minute that people were coming up to him at breaktime, you know, so he knew that that was his person.
	2-64-791	Yeah. They gave the impression of being so nurturing, and all, any… kind of assemblies they did or parent events they did, the Head would say we're a really inclusive school and every child matters, you know … And towards the end it just made me want to cry, because I thought, it's lies! You're not! You might want to be, but you're not.
	4-138-756	[Education advisory teacher] rung me after the one meeting and said, I've had two meetings in school now about your son. And every time I come out feeling really disheartened because they say they're going to do this, that and the other and they don't.

	4-146-967	So they were going to do two terms [with TA support] after and um, and then they were gonna apply [for a statement] again and whatever. But um, they haven't.
	4-157-1277	I said, oh can you, you know, can you encourage him to play with whatever? Um, and it was like, yeah, yeah, yeah. And they never do. There was talk of doing some sort of friendship circle, um, never done anything like that.
	5-187-458	And I said, whatever you do, don't send them to the Headmaster. Call me. If there's a real problem, you call me, and I'll come pick him up. Anyway, I get to school. [Son] is sat in the corner of the room with his bag and all his stuff strewn everywhere and terrified. Just having seen the Headmaster. And I said, I asked you specifically not to do that.
	1-8-183	We are very lucky here.
	1-30-754	I know that our experience of both the schools we've been at is so different to so many other parents. We have been incredibly fortunate to hit schools where they've listened and understood…
	1-31-790	… so as I say, my experience has been so different to so many other adoptive parents.
	1-32-814	But as I say, I know we are incredibly fortunate, we have had such a good school experience.
	1-5-99	Um, to give the school their due, they realised very quickly, they said to us, we actually had told them, and they knew it, when they actually went back through what we told them they actually realised that we had said to them, this is what is going to happen.
	1-29-732	I think it's the school's talked to us, they've believed us. They haven't said… we are fortunate we have a child who presents the same everywhere. He's not a child who holds it together at school. Err, I have a nephew who does that, and I know how hard that is.
	2-51-474	… it took its toll so much on me, because no one… believed… believed us really or… put any store by it.
	2-54-543	And I thought, so I have… I've thought all along, do they think I'm just being a dramatic parent, making something out of nothing? And I kept thinking no, they won't think that. Surely not after all the professionals we've had in. But obviously they did.
	3-88-379	… they were getting her ready [for a Christmas show]. I went into the office and I was like, do you want me to go and dress her 'cause I know what she's like? Oh no, no, no, they'll manage, they'll manage. Up until the day she left that school she hated her one-to-one teacher for taking her t-shirt off. Why do you not like Miss

		XXX babe? Because she took my t-shirt off. That's my privates. And I warned them! I said let me dress her. No, no, no, they'll manage, they'll do it, they'll be fine.
	3-90-427	… I knew that there was problems with these children from the day that they moved in, and nobody took me seriously.
	3-95-561	… they just couldn't understand the change in her. And it was for no reason. And it's like, but this is what I've been telling you for years. She's just so unpredictable and they don't get it. They don't get it.
	3-104-797	I was always going into school, going this is what happened, that's what happened, can you just tell her teacher, because I don't, obviously, didn't want to talk to her in front of [Daughter B]. Erm… but [sigh] they, they never really listened.
	4-123-336	I kept saying to her [the teacher], he's struggling and she's, no, no he's fine. No, he's fine. No, I said he's struggling.
	4-125-394	Used to say, you know, we're, we're doing this, you know, and having this and that and, no he's, and that's all we ever got, oh he was fine in school.
	4-134-623	… but I kept saying, he's struggling in school. No, he's fine. They just wouldn't have it.
	4-136-670	It was, I think it was just relief that someone was taking us seriously, and I wasn't an over-protective fussy parent who thought, you know, this, that, and the other about her child.
	6-240-207	Um, so we had to do quite a lot of education with the school. Um, and we started some of those meetings on our own with them. And then after a while, after we'd got some post-adoption support our social worker started coming, and that made all the difference because the school, not that they weren't listening to us, I just think they didn't have a context for it because it was such an unusual picture that we were painting of him when their experience was totally different.
	6-270-1023	I think that the period of time when we were really struggling and felt like we weren't believed that was probably the worst time, um, in that there was just such a disparity between the two sides of [Son B]. We never knew which one was going to wake up in the morning… But I think that isolation that we then felt probably was more extreme because nobody really knew what was going on.
	1-5-96	But they saw him as he was before, when they went into school he was sat, he was settled, he was calm, he was happy. they didn't see the child we knew they'd be getting in September, because we knew he would go backwards, he would struggle.

	1-23-583	… now he's actually settled, I'm seeing the joker in, the joker coming out again.
	1-27-692	People think, he can seem like he's not listening, the teacher says this, you can tell this because he will answer questions which the other kids are struggling with.
	1-28-699	… and the thing is the school have recognised and they're starting to see the child who we, my husband and I know is underneath it.
	1-29-734	He's not a child who holds it together at school. Err, I have a nephew who does that, and I know how hard that is.
	2-39-145	Just like that, it's like he completely changed. And it, he was, he was back to his normal self.
	2-41-175	… unless you were kind of with them in the home you probably wouldn't realise the extent of their needs 'cause they're both really, they appear quite, you know, bright, chatty, sociable, happy children.
	2-41-193	But outside, unless things are really, really bad, then outside he will mask a lot of that… he, to all intents in purposes seemed as though he had no additional needs whatsoever.
	2-42-214	… his behaviour became really challenging out of school. So we would literally leave, I would see his face change, he would be attacking me or his brother all the way home, trying to smash the car windows.
	2-72-1018	… we could have like six, eight months at a time and he was completely fine. He was just fine. But I haven't seen that child since he went into Year 1. He hasn't been back. Um, and I know he's in there.
	3-78-112	And she's just such an adorable little girl when she's in the right frame mind, but if you get her on the wrong day…
	3-94-531	… the day that she did lose her rag in school, and she poured water on everybody's work, pulled the classroom decorations down, graffitied the lockers, erm… threw everything off tables, they just looked at me and went, is this what she's like at home? Yeah.
	3-105-811	… they thought, she's this adorable 6-year-old. And she really is. Honestly, you look at her and you think, butter wouldn't melt. But seriously, she, can pack a punch. And the new school have seen it!
	4-123-338	… we've now discovered [son] is very good at bottling it in school. So he saves it all up, all day and then comes out of school and literally explodes.
	4-132-598	… we are seeing of all the issues we were having at home and we were having hell, you know, he was violent and whatever. I've had numerous black eyes, cuts, bruises, the lot. Um, and she's [the teacher] just sat there, going, no, we don't see any of that. It's fine. We don't see any of that.

	4-154-1203	You don't see the real [son]. I keep saying that to them. This isn't the real [son]. The real [son] is the one we literally cannot sit still… And I say to him some days, how do you hold all that in in school? And he goes, I don't know.
	4-168-1599	I: In an ideal world, what would you want staff at schools to be aware of when working with [son]? R: About how he's really feeling. That the face doesn't match the inside. You know, the inside is all churned up and anxious and worried and all the rest of it. And the face is just, yeah, I'm happy. I can do exactly what you're telling me to and I can, you know, and... and they don't, they don't see the real [son]. They don't see, yeah, the real, the real him. They see the image that he learned when he was little, you know, being neglected… So he's learned from little to put on this face to hide it all and they just don't see it, you know?
	5-177-192	…he was acting like a normal child. What can you say? You know, he's, he's, he's actually really fragile, you know, but he seems fine. You know, he's smiling, he's painting pictures, he's offering everyone cups of tea. You know, because there'd been no impingements then he was feeling, feeling okay.
	5-226-1510	… adopted children look normal. So you can't box it up in the classroom, you just can't go well that's that because of that. And they may change their behaviour all the time.
	6-239-178	I think for the whole five years that he's been at school, he is the model child. He's completely under the radar. He's completely compliant. He is smiley. He is, um, you know, he does what he's expected to do and then he explodes, he comes home.
	6-240-189	…the meltdowns are home were off the scale and having to manage that... so the 12 minute walk to school but with him kicking and screaming and you know. And then we'd get to the, um, entrance to the playground, off the road, and he would change…. But he then obviously had to contain during the day with the amount that he came out as well. But school did not see, did not see it at all.
	6-254-571	And so we need them to be aware of the whole child, not just that six-hour compliant boy.
	6-271-1049	And almost, and not wanting [Son B] to begin to act out his anxiety, but it would almost be helpful for everyone else if he did because then they would know what they're dealing with. But all the while it's hidden. It's how do you offer somebody support when you don't know what problem is?
IMPACT! on the whole family	1-3-62	… I spent a lot of time researching primary and secondary schools, as to what area of XXXX we wanted to move to…
	2-42-217	… our family life was ruled by behaviour like that for about 8 weeks …

	2-47-368	I think they had no appreciation how things were escalating at home because of what was happening at school.
	2-51-471	Um, I was really shaky. It was awful, the whole… I mean I, you know, [Son A] has been through, and he's continuing because of what happened, to go through a really hard time.
	2-56-592	And I thought, so you're making him sit there, doing work a year and a half above the level he's supposed to be at. And I'm panicking because he's falling apart at home.
	2-56-598	… one night I found him and he was just covered in blood, and he'd tried to pull his teeth out. Not loose teeth, his back teeth and he was saying, I just want to die Mummy, I just want to die. I thought how can, so there's no… we felt we had nowhere to go.
	2-63-769	[on difficulties of home educating] …it is hard at the moment, his behaviour is very hard, hence the smashed windows and the holes in walls and, so being around that all the time, yeah that's hard.
	2-69-940	There might come a point where his behaviour continues as it has at the moment, where I have to think about my own mental health as well.
	2-72-1030	And on keeping me and [partner] sane. I feel it might tip me over the edge if I… put in a complaint and had to deal with all that as well.
	3-83-227	[Daughter A] is devastated I've had to move her sister… she worries so badly about [Daughter B]. She's been crying in the night, I'm missing my sister and, you know, I don't know where she is, I don't know whether she's safe… I have never seen her sob the way she sobbed when her sister left. It was heart-breaking.
	3-109-913	It is very, very hard and a couple of weeks ago you probably would have had me in tears because I was so upset about how things were.
	4-123-341	So, he saves it all up, all day and then comes out of school and literally explodes. So, and takes it out on me. So, he's being very, very violent. So, we'd have like two or three hours every night of, um, him being violent and disruptive and throwing things and generally wrecking the place and whatever.
	4-123-358	… we had hell all weekend because he'd been told off.
	4-128-470	…we had hell. We had, um, sort of two, two and a half, three years of, um, him not going to sleep… and then he would just kick off. So we used to, um, we'd have a stairgate on his door and shut it and he would be in there and one of us, usually me, would be sitting on the floor outside, um, dodging whatever he threw. Um, and if you let him out, he would just go totally wild. So it was really, really hard.

	4-150-1088	…and someone to help him regulate so that he doesn't come out of school having bottled it up all day. 'Cause it's no good for him and it's no good for us. 'Cause our evenings are just manic.
	4-151-1118	So we'll have hell tonight because he's been called into Mrs XXX's office twice.
	5-173-87	And then suddenly it was all going so well. We just deci-, we thought, okay, and suddenly we had our lives back. Um, to the point where he started going every day.
	5-174-116	Um, I got quite depressed and anxious, um, not knowing what the future held. And getting cross with him.
	5-179-243	I walk past there [the nursery] now, and I still feel, oh god, that was awful.
	5-181-305	… I've got pictures of myself. I look really depressed, you know, just at my wit's end.
	5-196-685	I: And how was he at home during that year? R: Um, hell. I mean it's always; I mean we've had that he, he's... He is, I mean he's fine now. Um, but I would say it was probably hell all year because, um, I think he could hold it together at school.
	5-215-1215	… we'd had six weeks of loveliness and we thought we've really cracked it and we thought we'd found a way forward for him. And [partner] said I really think I might have a heart attack now.
	5-218-1295	They need to be making provision for these children. You're actually helping them do their job and actually you're not able to work because of that. You know, and then you say, but of course I'm not gonna put my child through the hell that is, you know, school if he's going to come out feeling terrible about himself.
	5-220-1351	I will be doing the lion's share of all the care. Um, getting him from one thing to another. So I've, uh, pretty much stopped working. Um, but my, our relationship at home, our relationships are much better, you know, I don't get angry anymore.
IMPACT! on others	3-100-679	Last year she had… Mrs XXX… and I can remember going into a meeting with her, and sending an email to the Head saying, something needs to be done. If [Daughter B] doesn't leave this school soon, I think you're gonna lose your teacher. Because the way your teacher was talking about my daughter, made me feel like she was majorly stressed, um, and she couldn't deal with what was going on. Erm, and this was early sort of stages into the year as well, and honestly, she looked drained, she looked petrified. So, I said something either needs to be done for [Daughter B] so that she's got support or you're gonna lose your staff.
	5-193-600	I worry about her [teacher] actually. She's diabetic, type one diabetic and I worry that she pushes herself far too hard.
The power of people		

The adults who matter	1-15-373	So, it's little things like that, it's… it's having that one person there, that key person there to support him, who really understands him.
	1-16-390	… it's having somebody who knows him and can read him and can see when he starts to dysregulate before it gets to be a problem. And can distract him. Can find, knows, has got the toolbox of things they can do to…
	2-40-169	…if people take their time with him, erm, then he'll get stuck into anything.
	3-104-776	They need to work with that child for a little while to realise what, how that child is. And their way of communicating and learn their style.
	3-107-859	Never seen her so happy to run into school to see the teacher. She ran in and gave her a massive hug. It was lush to see, absolutely lush.
	4-114-97	… we felt he needed a familiar face. And my nephew, my one nephew is a year older than [son] and my second nephew was a year younger than [son]. Um, so that he's always got somebody, he always had somebody with him.
	4-120-269	…they both loved him to bits, the teacher and the TA.
	4-165-1504	So she's [teacher] very good now at sort of distinguishing when he, you know, when he is genuinely anxious and worried about things and when he's not.
	5-193-602	[talking about Year 2 teacher] …he just loved her, and she let him come in at lunchtime and just sit while she had her lunch. So that's, that's what he did.
	1-14-337	…because of his attachment needs he needs to constantly know somebody's watching for him. You do actually know I'm here.
	1-16-402	… he needs to know that people are thinking of him. Even just a gentle, his teacher says just a gentle touch on the shoulder as she's walking round the classroom, just is a reassuring fact that she does knows he's there.
	4-150-1085	I'd like him to have, um, a one to one for certain, like certain hours. So that again, especially for secondary school, he's got somewhere safe to go to.
	5-199-771	He wants the teacher at all times. He needs to be with the adult. He needs to have the eyes upon him.
	1-9-200	They've just changed his TA deliberately because he needs somebody who's very nurturing, but he now needs someone who's going to push him and get him focused.

	1-11-271	The biggest concern we've got at the moment is we've got a change of the head of school in September. The head of school has been the same head of school for… she's been there at the school since 2002… And the ethos of the school is very caring, very nurturing. So yes, there is going to be a bit of emphasis on results…	
	4-135-651	But then his one-to-one's left, he's got a new one and she doesn't seem to be doing that sort of thing with him.	
	4-140-794	Um, unfortunately she's left and Mrs XXX has now taken over. Mrs XXX - need to be going in about Mrs XXX because Mrs XXX is just playing.	
	4-166-1525	But guttingly, she hasn't got the job for next year. So he is, really upset about it and he's really bothered about it at the moment that um, she's not gonna be there.	
	4-166-1544	…she's fab and I just wish she was staying 'cause he could do with another year of that. You know, you could do with another year of the consistency with her, um, and her knowing him so well. So I have said I'm going to ask whether she will stay in touch, whether I can have her mobile number. Um, and I think she will because I need to show him again that people are not dipping out of his life.	
	5-195-651	We got a bit too involved and I think he was too involved. Because then he had to change to another teacher.	
	5-199-808	…she [Year 4 teacher] called me in, um, for a meeting, and I'm like, what's this about? She said, I need to tell you that I'm leaving and I haven't told… the announcement's going out tomorrow but I need to tell you the day before so you can prepare... you know, when [son] comes out of school, that's what has happened. And I just cried and was like, why are you going? I didn't say this but, why couldn't you have either not taught him at all or waited until the end?... So then [son] came home that day and he almost put his fist through a door. I mean, he was absolutely... he was just beside himself.	
	6-235-63	The staff had changed a little bit when [Son B] went, so it wasn't quite as ...good, I suppose. It's not really the right word. It was just quite different, I think.	
	6-244-298	So she became a real advocate for him with the school. And it's a real shame that she's now left and they're not continuing with Thrive.	
Friendships	1-14-328	… he's a very sociable child and he wants to make himself liked he's getting on well with most other kids. The only trouble we have is some of the boys have started to realise how, because he's emotionally immature for his age, they're starting to realise how to wind him up [laughter].	
	2-40-158	I: Erm, what did your kids enjoy about school? What were their favourite things about school?	

		R: Their friends. I: So it was the social side of things? R: Yes.
	2-43-229	Mummy, XXX wasn't in school today so no one called me names. And XXX is his best friend who, erm, has his own additional needs and I think 'cause [Son A] was making other friends, XXX was trying to keep his attention by calling names, and obviously that had upset [Son A].
	3-98-647	I don't think [Daughter B] realises the impact of friendship, just yet. Um… She just can't, she hasn't got boundaries let's say for friendships maybe.
	3-99-653	She's got a best friend called XXX who, bless her, really understands her. Her mum works with adults with learning difficulties, so we've been over there a couple of times, and I've explained things to her mum, so her mum has explained things to XXX and XXX being as beautiful and lovely as she is, Is really supportive of [Daughter A]. But that's it I think for her with friendships because she can't… she can't have more than one person as her friend.
	4-114-110	… he's got a couple of his own, I say friends will use the term lightly because [son] is maybe attracted to children who have very similar needs to him.
	4-114-119	… they have a very much of an on and off relationship. They're either all friendly and love each other or they hate other's guts and it sort of tends to swing.
	5-178-226	…unfortunately [son] had chosen as his best friend, um, another boy … who had various moody, autistic, older brothers. And the mother, um, was very, very anxious and didn't like the friendship. And, um, that raised my anxiety levels even higher because she said to us over the summer between nursery and school that she wanted them to have a break. And we were very low at that point and we just... he was very, very dependent on this boy and the boy needed to get away 'cause he was quite fragile too. Um, he wasn't robust. [Son's] friends now are very robust, but this child was not robust and [son] would whack him like his older brothers did.
	5-186-424	So very quickly, [son] became a naughty boy, and the mother of his friend who was at nursery took the child away from the school. So [son] had no friends. Absolutely devastated.
	5-193-605	And he made new friends, uh, another boy, the same name as friend that he lost, um, and he was very jealous of that friendship. So if anybody else tried to come in, so he, he stabbed somebody in playground.

	6-247-286	He was unfortunately in a, um, a three-way friendship with two girls, one of whom we know the parents really, really well. And she's great. The other girl, we don't know the family in particular and she comes across as being quite manipulative and, um, very, very controlling. Um, and we were concerned about that friendship… He talks about lots of people, but he doesn't have friendships, particularly, with other children.
	6-249-437	I think he struggles with friendship. He doesn't quite know what it means to play with people.
	1-21-528	We were… had it not been for the fact my younger nephew is only ten months younger, we might have deferred his entry to school, because although developmentally he was ready, we knew he wasn't… socially and emotionally.
	1-24-587	He is however very vulnerable. We're having to watch, we've got a big horde of teenagers on the estate where we live, um, and one of the other, slightly older children was telling me he will do the stuff they tell him to do, so, we're working with him at the moment, because he's no stranger danger sense at all.
Individual differences make the difference	1-7-163	… they very much were choosing his pathway through the school, with teachers, because it was a two-form entry school and I know the current school said they still, they don't quite know what they're doing with teachers next year yet, because they don't think that the current Year 4 teacher would actually…
	2-68-908	She was really, she was a really good teacher. But that didn't carry on when we went through the school.
	3-87-343	… a couple of weeks ago, they changed her one-to-one and this new one-to-one was lovely with her, she would take her out where the other one wouldn't…
	3-106-848	if Miss XXX was there [Daughter B] would freak.
	3-108-906	I genuinely do believe that… it's down to the individual teacher, erm, rather than necessarily the school.
	4-115-144	So Reception was great because she [the teacher] was... And the TA, I've known the TA for a long, long time. And they both lovely people. Very, very nice. Very good with, um, helping him and all the rest of it.
	4-124-384	She [teacher] was very old school. Um, very shouty. Um, quite an abrupt woman. Um, not well liked by people in general.
	4-136-691	He's very, um, very calm, um, doesn't shout very often. Um, it's quite laid back… And [son] got on really well with him.
	4-166-1531	Miss AAA is lovely, but she's not, she's not Miss ZZZ, 'cause Miss ZZZ totally gets him. 'Cause I said to her, after he wanted to be dead …and I saw Miss ZZZ as I was round the school and I said, I said something to her.

		And she went, yeah, I went home and cried last night. And you know, and you think, she's just totally... Well parent's evening, first thing she said to me was, um, I love him. She is fabulous.
	5-176-185	The grown-ups seemed really nice. Um, one in particular who I really liked and still do actually. I think she did her best by [son]. Um, I thought they were kind…
	5-188-485	…we had a fantastic TA who was star… The TA came from a London school. She was a teacher, but she downsized, and she was just brilliant with him…. She got down to this level. So, talked to him gently, you know, just was there was a really lovely sort of presence, to help him kind of go in.
	5-193-596	And then Year 2, he had a fantastic teacher… She was adopted. She was young, sporty, energetic.
	5-199-775	… he got this amazing teacher and he changed completely at home. Um, he would get up, or go to bed and go, I can't believe I'm looking forward to seeing Miss BBB tomorrow… You know, he was just like this different boy, completely different boy... She's very, she's very good at making relationships with every single person in the room. She's very authoritative. Um, she's very managerial. Um, very energetic.
	5-202-849	It was a really useless teacher. Poor her, but she was utterly useless... So we met the new teacher on the first week and uh, said, it's really important you make a relationship with him and we could just see she was dead behind the eyes. She was like, well, you know, I taught them... no, but you really just need to tell him.
	6-243-289	…the TA that was the Thrive practitioner, was absolutely brilliant, and then she started coming into the meetings.
	6-246-357	She was good. She would pour it out, pull it out of him, and then she would also observe behaviours in the playground that perhaps other people wouldn't have seen or just things that were particularly out of character for him in the school setting. They're not out of character for home, but she would notice. And so she would go and pull him out.
	1-7-168	… there's not just my son in the class, there's a foster child and another adopted child. It's quite a tricky… high level needs class so they're thinking about how they're going to, what they're doing about teachers next year.
	2-79-147	[on nurture group] [Daughter A] didn't really take to that because there were some children in there who she didn't really like or who had been picking on her.
	4-127-464	… he ended up with, um, a little girl who's also got major, major issues. Um, used to cause lots and lots of problems, um, and used to wind him up a treat, which she still does.

	5-195-663	… into his class came, um, some quite tricky boys. Really tricky boys. Which was interesting because there's other classes that were much nicer, the mix was better. But [son's] class was full of really, really tricky boys.
	2-58-649	… our post-adoption social worker came to see me, and she said, do you want me to come back into school for a meeting. And we said no because we don't think it would achieve anything. And she said well, I just wanted to let you know that we'll support you in any way we can. Um, so that's nice, it's to have that even in the background just to know that someone thinks we're not entirely mad.
	2-67-879	I was sort of really upset, and so she [Reception teacher] was like, right OK, let's go and get, how would you feel if we went to get [Son A] now and we'll all have a chat together… And so, she was wonderful like that… Erm, but she said to me you know, I don't know what I can, I don't know if I'm doing this right, but I will try. And she was just, she was lovely. I felt that… yeah, it's kind of finding your way through the dark, do you know what I mean? But she really tried and she gave us a lot of support, she was brilliant.
	3-86-306	Erm, but he [headteacher] did keep her even though he excluded her I think it was four times, where he could have literally got rid of her and said, that's it, I'm not having her back… And he was a support and he was helpful with finding another suitable provision. And he went out and visited it, and he knows the head there, so in fairness he was very supportive.
	2-57-627	… we'd gone to an adoption support group meeting, um, with an Educational Welfare Officer there, and I had said what we were thinking about doing, and she had made it very clear that that wasn't wise, and she was very unhappy. And I kind of said well you've obviously not had a child in the position that our child is in, because I can't see any parent would leave their child in that situation.
Learning		
"Their emotional and mental health is what's important"	1-6-132	…so they recognised, they… they weren't a school who thought he's got to be able to learn, because he is very bright. They recognised they needed to work with him to get him emotionally secure, to trust them, to be happy, and he is starting to learn again, and he's making great leaps.
	1-7-154	… our EHCP very distinctly, it isn't around academic learning, it's about getting him… in the right place.
	4-126-438	… he doesn't learn unless he's feeling safe.
	6-242-258	… and I say now he's ready to learn in Year 5 whereas probably in Year 2, 3 and 4, he wasn't safe enough to be able to learn.

	1-10-249	…we don't care if he doesn't make any progress at all this year. We're expecting him, if he makes any progress at all we'll be delighted. We are expecting him to stand still or go backwards.	
	2-55-586	I'm not bothered about where they are level wise. Their emotional and mental health is what's important. I'm not bothered about the other side of things, at the moment.	
	4-165-1490	…she's [teacher] like, I'm not pushing him. She said, I know he's Year 5. Um, he hates writing. She said so, um, she said, I just want him to feel happy and safe. And that's what I want. You know, I'm not about, you know, 16 GCSEs and all the rest of it. Just want him to be happy and to feel safe. 'Cause unless he feels safe, he's not gonna, he's not going to do anything.	
	6-243-278	But because they were doing quite a lot of work on his emotional needs, we didn't want to try and do both at the same time because it was going to be too much for him. But now we're hoping with the school that for Year 5 we can get the interventions that he needs around his education gaps.	
Sensitive topics	2-61-716	… the teacher had written a question for him to answer, and it said, imagine you are an owl baby and you wake up one morning to find your mummy has gone. How would you feel? And [Son B] had written, I would feel very afraid. And I thought, you have, I was really sick, you have asked my child – I don't think any five or six-year-old at school should be asked that question or be put in that position. But a child who that has happened to multiple times?	
	2-61-734	In Foundation they would have done. And the teacher would say to me like, we're thinking of doing this. You know, what do you think?	
	5-230-1633	I: Have there been situations like that in a school where they've maybe been talking about, when I was a baby, things like that? R: I think inevitably, you know, so far, those days have always been really tricky then and they didn't do that very well. Um, I don't know. I just, I think all of the, I think those are so outdated, those, you know, modern families aren't, you know, all like that.	
	6-238-146	… we had, uh, the thing that every adoptive parent dreads is the, bring in photos of when you were a baby and let's talk about how families come together. And we're like, really? Don't. And it just felt like, it seems like you must've had other adopted children, come on. You know, so we had to sort of face that.	

"He does not want to be lumped into that group"	2-45-310	… they took him out, um most mornings for about fifteen minutes, but they took him out with a couple of other children who had really profound disabilities and he did [a physical activity group] with them. And I just thought, I didn't, I wasn't sure if that was really quite appropriate.
	5-191-566	I: So do you feel the nurture group was helpful? Do you think it helped him? R: It was at the time? Um, because it felt special then. But then he just got really bored of it. Mainly because it was for people with special needs and [Son] does not identify himself as somebody with special needs. Or rather he does not want to be lumped in with that group. Um, he just wants to be like everybody else.
	5-208-1015	And he doesn't want to do it [sensory circuits] 'cause it's with all the special needs kids.
Parents taking action		
Parents as experts	1-17-430	And that's one of the things I very much trained everyone who's with him to do is, even with him you're much better off telling him what you want him to do, not what you don't want him to do, because he won't actually at times hear the not part.
	2-43-256	Mrs XXX the Foundation teacher had said, look, I don't have the experience of attachment and trauma, what do I need to do, can you point me in the right direction… , I let her know about free training they could access…
	2-46-317	I had said, you know, if you can, when he's messing around in class, he's trying to tell you something. So he's, his behaviour is just a signal to let you know that there's something going on.
	3-80-158	…they tend to listen to me with [Daughter A] because they know, um, she's quite a difficult child…
	3-104-789	… they need extra time with the parent. Because I didn't know this teacher before she started working with my daughter. If she'd have come to me and asked me how I wanted her to work with [Daughter B], then there would be more of a, a better understanding. She went to the Headteacher who only knows the background a little bit. If they met with the parent to know what was going on, they'd have better understanding of what is happening with that child.
	3-105-804	Well, when she's having a bad day, I wouldn't even attempt to make her work, because she is gonna punch you in the face, whether you want her to or not.
	3-107-873	Take her out. Take her out onto the adventure trail… do something with her.
	4-126-427	I: How did you feel when she [teacher] responded like that?

		R: Um, very annoyed not to be taken seriously, 'cause at the end of the day I knew [son] better than her… You know, we know that, you know, not to ignore him. Um, and you know, he's hypervigilant, so he needs to be sat at the back of the class. So he can see what's going on rather than at the front.
	5-179-260	And then they were saying you've got to keep him here. Because I was thinking, well let's, let's not, you know. Um yeah, you want to keep him here and he's, he's going to have to learn and he's going to, you know, and then...
	5-227-1533	I had to speak to the head of the drama school, and just said, you know, you've got to see that [son], that's what he thinks about himself. You've got to be able to see that he's talking rubbish.
	6-269-985	[talking about Pupil Premium Plus] I think again, it relies on parents knowing what their children need to be able to say, we'd like you to use it for this.
	6-239-155	…so those sorts of things felt like we were educating them about their use of language and those sorts of things. But the school were very receptive to that. But I wonder whether they would've thought about it unless we'd given them any information, you know.
	5-182-326	…we gave her [SENCo] a book called, Why Can't My Child Behave… And we asked her to read it. Um, and she did.
	1-32-817	We had all sorts of, we'd made all sorts of plans, what would happen if he couldn't cope, or if he needed one of us at home
	1-32-826	I'll research everything that could potentially happen, so I'm prepared. When things have happened, I've actually known what needs to be done, rather than having to go an… so I'm, yeah, I'm prepared for the worst.
	2-57-616	Well we'd been thinking for a while that we might have to go down that route [home education] so it wasn't a new thing.
	2-64-800	… for maybe like two or three months we'd been kind of drip feeding in you know like not all children learn like this, some people do this, some people stay at home and learn.
	1-4-84	…when I finally got round to drafting the complaint, we reckon it got lost. We reckon it disappeared into the system and it was only when I started complaining in July, just before we moved last year that they found it again.
	1-26-655	So, it's just understanding, it's a conversation and I will start the conversations with the SENCos…

	2-38-104	[On letting the school know that her sons were adopted] I contacted them as soon as we got the place to let them know.
	2-45-304	I had said, um, if he could have some things, well we'd asked for the people around the child, the team around the child…
	2-49-402	We'd also asked about doing an EHCP, which they hadn't suggested prior to that at all.
	2-49-412	And then we asked for an educational psychologist.
	3-82-224	I was asking for one-to-one from the start.
	3-97-609	… although I will say that their statement is still wrong, or her statement is still wrong. I've asked for it to be changed and it still hasn't… so I have mentioned it to the lady that dealt with it, but she hasn't done anything about it so I'll give her a ring today.
	4-122-323	I spoke to the head about, cause I knew who the Year 1 teachers were, and I spoke to the Head at the time and explained my um, misgivings about Mrs XXX.
	4-126-431	… with every, all of his teachers, um, my husband and I have gone in beforehand, explained a bit about [son's] background, so they know he was neglected.
	4-127-444	… 'cause now I'm in all the time saying, right, what classes is he in, transition, when are we doing this, when are we doing that?
	4-148-1032	… I went and spoke to the ALNCO about transitions and how they would handle this that and the other.
	5-181-318	So the first thing we met, we set up a meeting with the SENCo, and then we got in touch with the virtual school before he started…
	5-184-392	And he only did part days. I didn't want him doing full days… we said this is going to be too long a day for him.
	5-191-547	So I went to see her, and I said [son] thinks you don't like him. It's really important that you, um, tell him that you do, because he's a very literal thinker, and all she had to do was say, I really like you. And then he will be fine…
	5-197-706	I went to school for a meeting to say at home, he is, um, behaving in these really bizarre ways, um, very aggressive, violent.
	5-216-1230	…I just have to be straight on the phone to county saying we need a new school.
	6-250-468	I ended up copying everybody in. So I would copy the class teacher, the SENCo, the deputy head, um, and often the Thrive TA as well because somebody in that mix would then do something about it.

	6-252-536	And the virtual school I've contacted, certainly when he first started, and then as he was moving between classes, just is there anything else we should be doing? What should we be asking for?
The battle!	1-4-71	It took us a bit of a fight to get him into the school because, yes, he's adopted, he's been looked after, but the schools round here are all one-form entry. They were all full. Um… and that's a bit of a battle because the EHCP only got finalised… beginning of the month [June 2019] err… and it was requested by his previous school on the 17th of November 2017.
	1-32-810	And that's what we're forever saying, as adoptive parents, campaigning, what we're always saying is…
	2-72-1029	I feel like… I have to concentrate all my energy on helping the children and on getting this right for them.
	3-78-115	… I've been fighting from Nursery to get her into a special school…
	3-85-287	… it is so, so, so difficult when it comes down to trying to get what you want, because you go to the Head, and they say, my hands are tied, I've got no money, we can't do…
	3-93-519	So then in school, in a classroom of thirty other children, [Daughter A] is fighting for the teacher's affections more, um, around the other children.
	4-119-229	four years later after being with us and going through lots and lots of sort of, um, hoops with [previous LA] and them trying to fob us off with this, that, and the other we've ended up with a, um, an attachment therapist.
	4-119-250	… we just started work on his, um, on his, his life story work when the funding was stopped and we're fighting to get more funding.
	4-139-771	I kept saying like, I'd like him to be assessed and you know, perhaps statemented, um, [current LA] are saying it's [home LA's] doing, because we live in [home LA]. [Home LA] are saying school need to do an ed psych assessment. Um, school are saying we're not doing an ed psych assessment cause we have three slots a year and [son] is not a priority so we were in a bit of a vicious circle.
	4-143-890	… he's not on the list [to see the EP] this year. And I was like, right, okay. Why? Um, oh, we got children with global developmental delay. And you want to go, I don't care about the children with global development delay. I care about him.
	4-144-906	I'm very, very cross a lot of the time at the moment to be honest with you. Yeah, absolutely fuming. Um, and as I say, they, the, I know their, their hands are tied. They have three ed psych slots a year. I know it's difficult, but they never class [son] as a priority.

	4-145-940	We've tried twice now to get [son] statemented.
	4-160-1362	It's just knackering. It is just absolutely. It's endless and there's always something. You seem to lurch from one thing to the next…
	5-216-1224	I rang up, I went in the next day, I was there at 8 o'clock in the morning, pleading, crying, let him come back at least for a few days, just let him come back.
	5-220-1336	So she [SENCo] is gunning for the statement. Absolutely gunning for the statement.
	6-256-644	… we will constantly have to be advocating for him to get the support that he needs. And then you feel like they're just going to give it because you're constantly on their back and that's not OK either.
	6-266-918	There's only so much I think in maintaining a good relationship with school that I can bang the same drum because I know how easy it is for parents to get blacklisted as, that's the one who just goes on about that all the time or whatever it might be. And so I guess there's a, there's a need for me to be aware of that 'cause I've then still got to sit in the meeting with the head teacher and talk about data or whatever.
Becoming an insider	2-44-267	So I started, a friend had asked me if I would help her to set up like a friends of the school PTA thing, and that's not me but I thought it will mean that the kids see me at school when there are things like events that might trigger them like discos or stuff I can be there. So I did that and I made sure I went on all the school trips.
	4-142-864	I'm on the PTA in school. Um, it's all, it's all deliberate because the more time I spend in school, the more time I get to know people and see what's going on. And you know, so it's the cunning plan.
	6-237-100	I'd already become a governor by then as well so it just, that sort of gave me a little bit of conversation with some of the senior leadership team about his needs.
	6-250-475	As a governor I think knew a bit more information than was good for me. But if I knew that we as a school had concerns about the SENCo, then I wasn't going to put my trust in the fact that she was going to do something about it. And I also don't... I didn't want her to be on it because I was a governor. I wanted her to be on it because my son needed her attention.
	6-258-702	Um, fortunately again, and maybe it is about who you know, I do some work in the school that [Son A] is going to and that hopefully [Son B] will go to. So I just need to know who I need to make friends with in order to get the help that I need. Because it is sometimes about, you know, just having those connections isn't it?

	6-259-718	I think it was about, um, one, if you have a chance to be in a position of influence, then you should take it. Um, and secondly, I may have a chance to... ensure that the decisions that are made for all of the children that are safeguarding my children in the midst of that. Do you know what I mean? I'm not like governor for [Son B]. I'm a governor for all the children that are there.
	Every school is different	
Choosing schools	1-3-67	There are a couple of schools around here that had a very good reputation amongst adopters…
	1-11-260	I have a look and talk to other adopters that I'm in contact with.
	1-12-291	… one of the other adopted parents I know sends her sons there.
	2-35-46	Another school, XXXX, we had a friend with an adopted child and her experience was horrific, so that was ruled out.
	2-37-78	And it was just a really nice, it was a small school. The head showed us round and she was wearing this amazing dress, and when I said, oh I love your dress, she said a pupil, umm, a pupil went on holiday to India and brought it back for me and it's his last day at school, so I thought I would wear it so we could have our photo taken together. And I just thought, well that's just nice isn't it?
	2-37-88	It was really, it was higgledy-piggledy, it wasn't everything… do you know what I mean, it wasn't, not that it wasn't orderly, but it felt kind of homely and it felt kind of nice… It reminded me of my primary school I guess.
	2-38-114	… when we went again and the head showed us round, then she seemed, you know, she seemed to have quite a lot of knowledge and, yeah. They were quite, they were really inclusive and they were really positive.
	2-70-957	The thing that worries me is the school had already given me all the right answers, and yet… it was appalling.
	5-175-158	[when looking around nurseries] One was um... was so rigid. We just thought, no, that's not gonna, we don't like it. And the other one was quite chaotic, and we thought, no, that's, not gonna work.
	5-177-206	But my impression at the nursery was that it was sweet. Um, and the children, that went there were sweet, and the other mums were okay.
	5-183-349	But it was in lots of open space, really great headmistress. Um, kids seemed really happy. Lots of art on the walls, not too busy. That was our first choice.

	1-8-177	I was talking to somebody yesterday who'd been at XXX which is the feeder secondary school, uhm, but was saying that even when she was here eight years ago, the school had a reputation for being very nurturing and very caring.
	2-35-38	… our social worker at the time had told us, one of the schools, that she was working with a family that had a child there, and said, don't send your child there. So that one was always was always off.
	2-36-55	We'd heard really good things about [school sons attended], it was a really small school… they had like a hundred-plus-year history of looking after looked-after children.
Staff knowledge, awareness and understanding	1-10-232	…we have found a school that actually has one, listened to us, has worked with us, hasn't immediately thought the behaviour, they've understood the behaviour isn't a choice. They're now starting to see him, they're starting to understand that yes he can be a very typical 7-year-old boisterous boy, and they are starting to see that side of him…
	2-59-684	… if we could have just had some understanding and some nurture for him. If they could have treated him – this is what we kept saying – treated him as the age he's presenting at.
	3-82-221	…it was very difficult with [Daughter A] trying to get people to understand why she was the way she was and school didn't really, erm, didn't really help her.
	3-105-830	And they just never really understood, erm… because any little thing could set them off. Erm… and that's what they didn't understand. They wouldn't realise that saying, when we've done your, letters then we'll do play dough. Well, no! I wanna do play dough! And they'd be like, no, we're doing letters first. You argue with her, she ain't gonna comply. She ain't gonna listen, she's gonna lamp you.
	3-108-888	It's a nightmare. School and children with additional needs from an adoptive background. It's a nightmare. Every single adoptive parent that I've spoken to have had the same issues. Because school, mainstream school, just don't understand.
	4-158-1314	Um, some of them [other parents at school] don't get it. Some of them do. You pick what you say to people. So, some of them I will say more to than others. The only people who know truly what's going on in my life are other adoptive parents.
	4-151-1096	… he's petrified of the head, absolutely petrified of Mrs. XXX or acting head she is. Um, so she's rung me and said, oh, I've had him in, and she doesn't understand that he's petrified of her. Um, and that, that just really sort of escalates him. His anxiety will be off the roof.

	5-211-1084	So the Headmaster was saying, [son] can't take any kind of criticism, he can't take any kind take any kind of rough and tumble, and I'm like, no he can't. So then I said to them, would you put a four-year-old into a playground with a whole load of nine-year olds? They kept sending him out there and then wondering why it all went wrong.
	6-264-840	I understand, if you haven't had attachment training and you have a, a family describing their home life and then you see the child... who doesn't display any of that behaviour, it's easy to go... there must be something wrong here. If there was that understanding of attachment and trauma then the disparity between the two children would make perfect sense. But without that understanding, it's really difficult for them to believe and accept what, what they're being told is happening outside of their little six hour world.
	1-6-124	One of the things his school, his class teacher said to me… She's done 20 years as a child physiotherapist before she trained as a teacher. She's aware of looked after children so she knew, so she does…
	1-30-759	The SENCo at the previous school actually went away and was prepared to read all the Louise Bombér books and everything, so she went away and she's educated herself.
	2-52-487	[following trauma and attachment training which two members of school staff attended with parents] And afterwards we were stood in the coffee queue with [Son A's] teachers and they had said, gosh, you know, that was awful. How would you even cope with that? And we had said, well, that's what we go through, everyday! All the time! And they were really shocked.
	2-52-502	… she was a newly qualified teacher and I know that she didn't have the experience or the training or the resources… to do much really.
	5-208-1011	So they do sensory circuits in the morning, but I think, I don't think they, they don't have a professional doing it, I think they just get a few benches. I think they read a book, and go, right, let's do this.
	5-211-1095	So, what the problem was is that they had, um, playground assistants who have no attachment training, no knowledge of the child. And they, [son] would be vile to them. Shut up. You can't tell me what to do. They would send him straight to the Headmaster. So they haven't created a relationship with him. Same with the lunchtime staff…
	1-14-338	… and we get a lot of, what most people say, is attention-seeking behaviour, is in fact more attachment.

	1-15-353	Both his TAs read him and start to recognise, and if he starts to dysregulate, he'll go, if he's not too bad he'll go into the quiet corner in the classroom, and just lay down with a book on his tummy…
	1-23-563	I: Do you think that they consider your son's needs to be similar to the looked after children? R: Yeah. They don't necessarily see, they very much acknowledge, and they understand that children, our children come from the same background and a lot of the time the needs are very similar.
	1-20-495	…. he needs… the people he has contact with in school to understand that, to… as I say his class teacher, he sits, he deliberately sits in such a way that he can see the rest of the class. Um, he's in, they very carefully think about where they've sat him, so he's, 'cause he's got, he's got, some level of hypervigilance.
	1-29-743	… it's little things like they've understood he has, when he's struggling, when he's wobbly, his ability, because of the sensory stuff, his ability to read his body, so his ability to know when to go to the toilet goes completely. So, they, they very quickly got in the habit of telling, doing what we do when he's like that which is getting him to the toilet at regular intervals.
	2-50-446	…she [TA] said, and [Son A] has been disruptive today, [Son A] is always disruptive but even by his standards he has been disruptive. And I said right, so what's happened today? And she said well we had a new teacher in this morning teaching them phonics, Miss XXX wasn't here, how am I supposed to cope when he's being so disruptive? Oh right, so one of his huge triggers, you have someone new in the class he's never seen before, he didn't know she was going to be in there. Of course he's going to start messing around or chattering, that's when someone's supposed to step in and help him to regulate himself.
	2-54-559	We'd had his, when we got his report at the end of Year 1, … it hadn't been in particularly, it wasn't written in a very nice way and it said you know he can be very disruptive in class, you know, [Son A] needs a lot of supervision. But there was no, reference to the fact that he had additional needs! … he has additional needs that weren't being met and yet I was just being told in his report that, you know, he needs a lot of attention. And that was it.
	3-95-566	And I just think they look at her as a naughty child. But she's not a naughty child, she's a troubled child.
	4-125-409	There were lots of signs, but they weren't picking up on them.
	4-135-657	When he started in Year 3, we had parent's evening in the October and his teacher, Mr XXX said, I'm a bit worried about [son]. He's really quiet, he's really withdrawn, and you know when you want to say Hallelujah!

		At last! So I nearly cried at that point… Um, so from that moment, I think we finally, school finally started, or some of the teachers are starting to twig that he may be quiet, but he's not, he's not fine.
	4-136-684	He [teacher] said, well, you know, it's not fair that just because [son] holds it in, in school, he's not getting the support that he should be having. So that was a bit of a turning point.
	5-174-123	They hadn't noticed that he can't follow instructions. They hadn't noticed that. He needs his best friend to be with him all the time. They hadn't noticed that.
	6-242-241	… he's not a child on the radar. He's not a child that is being excluded. He's not a child that has particularly significant social needs. He's not a child that has, he's not dyslexic or anything like that. When we are asking them to continue to put in this level of intervention, they're thinking, well why? This is not a child that demands our time.
	2-38-111	… the person who showed us round initially didn't seem to have that much knowledge about the Pupil Premium Plus, I think she thought it was the Pupil Premium, so that was a bit concerning
	2-49-413	And [the headteacher] said on the phone, we won't be able to pay for the educational psychologist. I said, but he needs one! And he has a Pupil Premium Plus, £2300 a year. She said, well it costs £500 per child for an educational psychologist so we won't be able to pay for one. So that was it, they'd refused to do that.
	2-59-670	We got a letter about his Pupil Premium, because he was in an intervention group with eight other kids in his class who were a little bit behind. And they, that's what they were using his Pupil Premium for… so it didn't go on anything that was… specific to help [Son A] or was that attachment or trauma informed.
	3-85-284	I think it's funding. I think it's a lot down to funding. Even though adopted children are supposed to have a bit of extra money, I don't think the school wanted to give that up because of funding cuts everywhere else.
	5-218-1285	[talking about setting up a flexible timetable] We've done it and I need to talk with school about whether we can divert some of his Pupil Premium to pay for it. 'Cause it's all quite expensive.
The Approach	1-12-277	So yes, there is going to be a bit of emphasis on results…
	2-36-50	… they're an outstanding school and their emphasis is on results and I have other friends who's children, who's adopted children have been there, who have been pulled out because their experience is horrific…
	3-96-581	This is why [Daughter B] had to be moved from School X because she wasn't academically there, as far as I'm concerned. She wasn't able to sit and listen and comply, like a little robot.

	4-148-1018	… he won't go to the high school, um, that his school feeds into because it's a very academic school and we went in for the open day and that's all they banged on about. It was how good their results were.
	5-194-625	I mean it's a good school, you know, it works for children who can behave. It's very academic, but I don't feel he [headteacher] got the nuances of behaviour.
	6-261-769	And this is my bug bear with SATs, which I think are completely inappropriate for primary age children. It does nothing for them. It just is about the school. Um, it doesn't actually measure the, the human being that they're becoming as they go into Year 6. You know, it doesn't, it doesn't do any of that.
	1-31-804	And as the SENCo says a lot of what they do actually benefits all the children. It's not just, the changes, what they do, it's a whole school ethos.
	1-32-812	… what we're asking for, in a lot of cases, will benefit all children. All we're asking is for schools to change their approach for everybody.
	2-59-667	… the children interact with most of the staff in that school, so they all need to be aware.
	1-17-406	… it's not big things we're asking for, it's just little things like understanding they need a consistent person to go to if they start to…
	1-20-503	It's just little things like the teacher just giving him a… acknowledging him and smiling at him.
	1-31-798	It's just those little, it's those basic things… It's little things. He's not had – yes, he's got the 1-1 support – but other than that, everything else they've done has not been huge adjustments.
	3-87-358	The new one just was able to just manage [Daughter B] and the way she was, erm, you know, encourage her to do stuff. Where the other one was, let's sit down, let's draw.
	4-141-831	… somebody shouted, um, you know, he was made to go to assembly, and it was singing assembly and he doesn't like this.
	4-155-1226	And then it doesn't take a lot, you know, it can be somebody shouting. It can be somebody, you know, making a comment to him and he'll come out and say someone was mean.
	5-193-603	… she let him come in at lunchtime and just sit while she had her lunch.
	1-6-128	…one of the comments the school made to me very early on is, we're not doing any kind of sending homework home, not expecting him to do any work outside of school, because until he is emotionally secure and trusts us, there's no…

	1-15-362	He needs the ability when he starts to really struggle to go back into things like messy play and so he goes down into Key Stage 1, goes down into Reception to play with the sand, play with the water.
	1-15-369	…and they recognise that just before, as he starts to get hungry, everything starts to disintegrate so he tends to be in early, he tends to be in early lunch, rather than waiting for the rest of his class.
	1-19-464	[on flexi-schooling] Well basically it's where I take him out… straight after afternoon register, one afternoon a week, so he doesn't loose, the school doesn't mark him as absent, but he basically comes home… it was my post-adoption social worker who suggested it and school's been absolutely fine over it, we've all agreed.
	1-24-604	So, they're very much taking his lead and, he sits with his TA in collective worship and assembly. And if he's struggling, he comes out, if they realise he's struggling it evens starts, they just don't take him in.
	2-49-393	… we had asked them about the behaviour policy … And the deputy head rang me after this last meeting and said, no, we won't be changing the behaviour policy. And I said, oh, have you, do you have exper– I mean I hate confrontation so this, I was literally on the phone shaking, I said have you got experience of working with traumatised children? Well it's, well you know, we have to stick to the behaviour policy. [whispered] Right.
	2-63-779	I said, could he have a role where he helps in Foundation or something, or could he be… but they wouldn't do that.
	2-63-784	… I had said you know, could he have some members of staff… who he could just go to. You know, he can go to at any time. But no, they wouldn't let him do that.
	2-68-903	…they have the traffic light system at school. She [friend who was a GP] had said that she wasn't happy with it, because she'd seen the effect it has later in life. And [Reception teacher] had said, what do you think we should do instead?
	3-104-781	[Daughter B] still soils herself. She goes to the toilet and refuses to wipe herself. And I've specially asked, and asked, and asked, but we're not allowed to do this. But then she gets upset then, when she's got mess in her pants, and she can't undress herself. And she'll just sit there and freak. Well, help her! I'm giving you my permission to help my child when I can't. Surely that's something that you should be doing.
	3-104-801	They just had their plan of what they wanted to do that day, erm, and whether or not it was a good day or a bad day, they would still try and make her try and work.

	4-116-157	When he started, um, they have a phased start. Um, and we did ask that he would, we spoke to the Head at the time … explained to him that we thought [son] would be better starting... So that he got a feel of the place… And they did that. So he was, um, he was one of the first, he was the first to start.
	4-165-1509	…she [teacher] said no other child in the class is allowed to go to the toilet as often as he is. But she, when he says, oh I need the toilet, she lets him go.
	5-173-101	… he's got to learn how to behave and you know, and it was a, it was a sort of Christian nursery. It was very much; we line up when you do this.
	5-189-519	We would say over and over again, can he come in first? Or can he come in last? [shakes head]… In that first year it was mainly wanting him to go in first and sit in the classroom while everyone else... but they wouldn't do that.
	5-218-1274	So he's gonna do a flexible timetable. And on a Monday, he's going to do filmmaking in the afternoon rather than whatever they do at school. On the Wednesday we've got him a private tutor who's a sen- she does lots of sensory stuff with him as well.
	3-76-58	… it was just awful. It was really dreadful. They were excluding her. They were sending her home illegally. They, um, reduced her timetable. Whenever she was naughty, she was sent to a room and just sat in a corner and done nothing. And she was just so upset because she couldn't be part of the same class.
	3-78-92	… she was kicked out of playgroup…. She wasn't allowed to go back anymore, they had too many complaints so they kicked her out…
	3-81-181	Well, don't you think by standing in front of a door and blocking [Daughter B] in a room littler than this room, isolating her away from her peers, not allowing her to play with other children, and then standing in front of a door and not letting her out, trapping her in a room, and [Daughter B] coming home and crying that I'm locked in my room… Well no it's not! It's not fine!
	3-85-294	… she ended then needing to be taken away, so she had to have… because that was the only thing. 'Cause that was the only thing that they could do.
	3-96-595	But [Daughter B] got a behaviour problem and a learning problem, so she had to go. Hence why she's now in a special unit.
	3-101-720	… that's why she wasn't complying, and that's why I think three or four weeks into Year 1, she was isolated away.

	5-174-110	…they were saying, well, they have this bike at nursery, and everybody wanted it. And they said to me one day, what should we say? No bike? And I said, that's a brilliant idea. As in put the bike away and they meant, no, [son] was not to have the bike.
	5-203-865	And we went to parent's evening, which was halfway through the term and we went to find his books and he was sat on his own. So he'd been internally excluded. I'm like, how to you feel about sitting on your own [son]? It's fine, I like it.
	5-203-881	… then we started picking him up at lunch time. And then we started picking up for PE and then we started picking up for French, and we thought, he's actually not at school, we need to do something about this.
	5-214-1184	And then on Monday they said you've got to come pick him up straight away. We've had two parents here saying their children aren't coming to school if [son] is here, so [son] can't be here.
	5-215-1210	I remember that evening, they sent me an email saying he was not coming back and we ask you, we'd like you to agree that you voluntarily withdraw him, so that he doesn't have it on his record.
	1-2-23	There were… legal hold ups [sigh]. And for, it wasn't actually on the social work side because actually the court process, it was the court process that just… various reports were requested on birth family and… and they went to an inappropriate provider initially and it all got a bit complicated.
	1-4-77	Um… and that's a bit of a battle because the EHCP only got finalised… beginning of the month [June 2019] err... and it was requested by his previous school on the 17th of November 2017.
	4-150-1074	So you just, it's frustrating 'cause we are really stuck in the middle of it, unable to do anything.
Communication	2-47-359	So, it was five of us, me and [partner] and our three professionals who all turned up. And the school were obviously very put out that we'd all come … and it was really uncomfortable. They were obviously very put out that we'd all come.
	2-53-522	… when I had a meeting to tell them that I was taking them out, the Head said to me, uh, and I was, I'd been fine about it, but the minute I walked into the office I just burst into tears.
	3-89-404	We had meetings and meetings and meetings and meetings and meetings. We always felt like we came away from the meeting, and… you know, there was another meeting for the sake of another meeting… They were all saying what they wanted to say, and then they said let's come back in six weeks and we'll figure out what's happened then. And then we come to the next meeting and it's like, well nothing's been done.

	1-9-205	[on changing the TA who worked with son] …they warned us they were going to do this and they're working very carefully.
	1-18-449	I do have fairly regular… meetings, we do have catch ups. The SENCo keeps in contact. She tends to now, because, when we had the EHCP I actually said to her, look if it's not an urgent thing can you email me because actually with my own autism, I don't deal well, I don't always process things on the phone properly.
	1-21-513	I think the biggest thing is I do try and tell them if um, if, things like when he's had a particularly bad night's sleep, we all know that's going to cause him to be particularly tricky the next day… I just email the school office and say…
	1-33-837	… I think a lot of it is keeping a dialogue with school. The biggest thing for me is just keep touching base, keep that communication line open. Tell them when there's been a big change because things do happen and if you don't keep the school informed… It's a two-way communication, you expect them, so you need to let them know what's going on.
	2-56-590	[after finding out that Son A was 18 months behind academically] But just the fact that they had never communicated that to us.
	2-67-871	… we'd had an incident when [Son A] first started his therapy where he'd got a knife in the kitchen and threatened [partner] with a knife. This was before school so I'd taken him into school and [Son B] was in Foundation at that stage, and I thought I'd better tell his Foundation stage teacher…
	3-80-163	… if I say she's had a bad day, they listen. Erm, if something has happened, they generally listen.
	3-82-217	'Cause I'm an open book, I will give people whatever information they want, because to me it makes my life feel a little bit normal then, because you understand why my children batter me.
	3-93-498	[Daughter A] used to get really upset if the teacher was talking to me. So, we kind of, we do sort of a thumb, a thumb thing when she's not looking. We did a home school book, but now that [Daughter A] can read, we thought that's not a good idea anymore.
	3-103-750	[following EP work with Daughter B] … whenever I asked what happened, I was never given feedback on it. it would have been interesting to have spoken to her to say, well, what do you think and you know, where should we be going rather than just seeing it written down on a bit of paper, that's what they're recommending.

	3-104-778	I could write down so many things of 'who I am and what I do', and, and I've done it in the past, erm, and it's like, nobody's taken a blind bit of notice.
	3-107-864	And we've not had a single phone call since. 'Cause every day I was getting a phone call… And it was like, well what do we do? Can you come and get her? No! I'm in work!
	4-120-260	… she [Reception teacher] would come out most weeks and say, he can do this and he can do that. She'd come up and say, oh he can do, we've been doing this and we were doing that.
	4-121-291	I used to pop in, in the, in the morning and say, or you know, he's upset about something now. And at the end of school you had that contact 'cause I was taking him in and picking him up. You had that contact and she'd say, oh you know, he's been told today and whatever and you know, um, he's had a good day today and so there was always someone to, to see before school and after school.
	4-142-857	I go into school and talk to them about so much.
	4-143-895	… the, um, ALNCO in school twice now, last, this year and last year, she passes me in the corridor and goes, oh, we haven't got an ed psych assessment for [son] again this year…. This year she, again, she passed me in the corridor and goes and goes, oh, he hasn't got a slot again this year.
	5-194-642	…she [teacher] used to ring us every day, and I'm like, why are you ringing? She's saying, oh to tell you he's done really well. Like, OK, but every time I see the school come up on my phone, you know my heart like races. It was almost like a bit too much information.
	6-251-499	[the SENCo] didn't communicate with the adults particularly well and if a family were particularly pushy, she, she would almost cut them off and then it became a very difficult relationship for that family to get any help for their child.
	5-209-1030	… the school, probably my instigation, which I'm not going to do when he goes back, were emailing me every day and basically every day he was doing something terrible.
	5-2013-875	… no-one had told us. So no one was feeding back to us what was happening in the classroom.
Staff training	1-8-186	… we had, two and a half years ago, had ASF funding to go through the assessment and course with her [occupational therapist], which included training for school at the time. In fact, it was one of the TAs from the school who came with us, because the SENCo had been two months earlier… But the SENCo in the new school, they had it for another adopted child in the school and she's, she came back and immediately started sensory circuits.

	1-22-543	I think the biggest thing is making sure they've all got the attachment training. So, all the staff are aware of [son's] needs.
	2-44-261	… as far as I'm aware, the Foundation stage staff did the attachment training. But nothing really changed for [Son A].
	2-59-663	I'd have liked them to have, um, I guess, got… all the staff trained in attachment and trauma, because there isn't just [Son A] in that school that has difficulties relating to attachment and trauma.
	3-108-892	They say they have all this training. They have adoption agencies coming in and giving all sorts of courses and training, and stuff. But unless you've got the staff that's willing to listen and work at that training, they ain't got a hope in hell of keeping a child like [Daughter B] in a mainstream school.
	5-228-1556	And the idea that you, that you do attachment training is... I mean [son] must have every attachment style in the book and we all do, we're all... We attach to different people in different ways, you know, to just say [son] might have an avoidant style, well he might have an avoidant style with one person. He might have secure attachment with someone else. I sometimes feel like schools have quite a simplified understanding of attachment and a sort of one size fits all approach to it and don't consider individual children and their individual needs. And how varied that can be in different situations.
	6-263-816	So I think there should be, um, mandatory training for all staff on attachment issues. I think that should include kitchen staff, midday supervisors
The school environment	3-101-709	… they had a new building, so all of the Reception children were in there. This is the classroom, out there was the hall, and they had 90 other children out in that little area out there. So not, there was no quiet area for [Daughter B] to go to, um, it was a different building from where [Daughter A] was. Um, so if [Daughter B] wanted to go to the toilet, she'd go out to 90 children and be like [gasp]. Overwhelmed. And then she'd come back into the classroom and still hear those children outside, so even if the class was quiet, those children out there were all really loud. So, there's no quiet space for her.
	3-84-265	Even though she [Daughter B] had a dream that the school had jails. And she was just gonna be a locked in a jail, so her anxiety is err… unbelievably high…. they've got some grids on the window which look like a prison, but, they, they assured her that it's not jail, it's just where the kids are out playing, it's to save the windows. Erm, and she, every day she'll go past saying, look there is a jail Mum, and I'm like it's not a jail, but she's just kind of fixating.

Transitions		
The honeymoon period	2-39-147	So he went to school really excited, really happy.
Reception into Year 1	4-116-171	…he went in straight away. First day he was the first through the door. So he was like, bye! And I was thinking, you know, oh, right. Okay.
From primary to secondary	5-185-415	I: And how did he get on then in that kind of initial settling in period? R: He was fine. [Son] was always fine for a while and then when he feels comfortable, it all comes out.
Aspirations	1-32-830	We had, until the start of Year 1 we actually had, there were very little signs of any problems. It was the start of formal learning, expecting him to stay in one place and not have any freedom [laughter].
	2-42-208	Well he was fine in Foundation, he loved it and the staff the staff were amazing. Um, and … I guess it's a really play oriented, nurturing environment with a high ratio of staff.
	2-43-238	… he was completely fine until the August before he went into Year 1, so a couple weeks before he went to Year 1 and his behaviour changed, became again, violent, aggressive, defiant, controlling. Just a nightmare.
	2-60-697	I think it was because… it was, there was so much play. They could direct a lot of their own activities. They sat behind a desk for short times. They were off playing, there wasn't that pressure to do things that were way beyond him.
	2-62-751	They were really thoughtful in Foundation.
	3-101-705	… things got better then, as the year went on, and she was managing. Then as soon as she went into Year 1… [shaking head].
	4-115-139	… the, especially the Infants, they're very, um, it's very nurturing and the Reception teacher in particular is very, um, sounds awful, touchy feely, but they're good with hugs and, and whatever and empathy and all the rest of it.
	4-120-258	His reception year. He was, um, he did really, really well.
	4-120-275	…looking back now, it was, it was his best experience of school... And it was only when he went from reception into Year 1. And I think things got less nurturing. Um, there was more work involved, less play.
	1-25-629	That is, SENCo and I are already talking about that. We're already saying we need to be looking at this, looking at working out where he's going and talking to SENCos next year when he's in Year 4, which has caused a few people to raise eyebrows, but as I've said, you know, because of everything, we've got to get it named on his EHCP at the end of year 5…

	1-26-644	We deliberately choose to move here because the other area we were particularly looking at, the secondaries were zero tolerance behaviour approach which we knew would be an absolute no with our son because his behaviour is not always a choice.
	4-148-1014	…and our problem is, [son's] going to high school now. He's Year 5 now. He's got two weeks left in Year 5, Year 6 in September. Already panicking about going to high school 'cause I keep having, I don't want to be 11. I don't want to be 11.
	4-155-1219	…some kids can hold it in primary school, but then they get to secondary school and they just cannot hold it in. They cannot cope.
	4-163-1449	I don't think he's gonna cope. I think it's all just going to be too many people and too much to think about. His executive functioning is awful. He's not going to remember, um, like books and PE kits and all the rest of it.
	5-222-1401	All of his friends are gonna be going to this school called [School C] in [hometown] which is massive, very strict. Very academic. He is not going. He really wants to go there. He is not going, unless there's a miracle in the next two years. Because you get, um, whatever they're called, these black marks against your name just for not having your shirt tucked in, it's so strict. And if you talk back, which [son] does without even thinking, all the time, he's just going to be constantly in trouble.
	5-225-1478	But they, you get lots, like for instance, if you forget your ruler, you get one of these, you know, like a demerit. So there's a lot to remember. And [son] can't even remember to brush his teeth.
	6-255-605	I: So how are you feeling in general about the move to secondary? R: Nervous. Very nervous for a whole load for reasons. Obviously his vulnerability is massive… And also, you know, primary is a nice nurturing environment. There's not many places where you can hide in a primary school and all the teachers know all the kids really, um, but secondary is not like that… I just don't know how, how he'll cope with it.
	1-25-614	…we are all hoping that he'll make the Year 6 leaver's [assembly] at the end of this term, because he is… in such a better place…
	1-26-660	…we're all hoping he can move away from needing full 1-1 support… we're hoping that as he settles into secondary to move back to a safe space.
	3-99-662	… she's not gonna be one of those girls that hangs round in a gang, because she just won't be able to handle it. At least I'm hoping. I'm really hoping.

	3-109-915	But now, she's settled, you know, she, she just wants to be a kid, and that's what I want for her. I want her to have the life that she deserves.
	4-164-1480	[talking about secondary school] Um, so they do sound as if they should be supportive, but until you're in there, you never know do you?

Appendix M – Validity of qualitative research

In adopting the four core principles of Yardley's (2000) framework for assessing validity and quality in qualitative research, further detailed in the context of interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA) by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), the following considerations were addressed throughout the research process:

Core principle and criteria for validity of research (Yardley, 2000)	How this study meets the criteria
1. Sensitivity to context • The research is contextualised in relation to relevant theoretical and empirical literature. • Sensitivity to participants' perspectives and socio-cultural context (during both data collection and analysis). • Sensitivity to ethical issues. • Awareness of the relationship between researcher and participants and the potential power imbalance.	• The researcher conducted a thorough review of the literature, and used a PRISMA diagram (Part 1, section 1.2) to record the search process. Search terms are shown in Appendix A. • In addition to the literature review in Part 1, relevant research is included in the introduction and discussion sections of Part 2. • The researcher has familial experience of adoption, which could be said to have made the researcher aware and sensitive to the issues faced by participants. • The sample was recruited purposively using clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, as outlined in Part 2, section 2.5. Participant demographics are given to provide more information about the sample, while maintaining anonymity. • The researcher attempted to negotiate power imbalances by taking time before each interview to put the participants at ease through general conversation. Participants chose where to be interviewed, (e.g. their home, workplace or a local meeting place). • Informed consent was sought from each participant prior to each interview. They were given time and space to ask questions about the study. A debrief form was provided to participants containing information about accessing support following the interview.

	• Participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the research at any point before transcription. • The research met the ethical guidelines for practice set out by the Cardiff University Ethics Committee. Ethical considerations are explored in Appendix K, and in Part 3, Section 3.6.
2. Commitment and rigour • Thorough data collection. • Breadth and depth of analysis. • Demonstration of methodological competence and skill. • An in-depth engagement with the research topic.	• The researcher conducted six semi-structured interviews. • The researcher was guided loosely by a prepared schedule, which is in Appendix H. Mostly, the researcher was guided by the participants, and allowed them to relate their experiences in a way that was natural for them. The researcher chose when to probe further and elicit more details from participants. • The researcher analysed the data using the IPA process suggested by Smith et al. (2009). • The researcher became immersed in the data through repeated re-readings of the transcripts. Annotations and comments were added to the transcripts in an iterative process (see Appendices O and P, and full annotated transcripts, submitted separately). • A research diary was kept in which the researcher reflected on the research process (see Appendix R).
3. Transparency and coherence • Presentation of analysis that shows clarity and power of description or argument. • Fit between research questions, theoretical framework and methods used to collect and analyse data. • Transparency in methods and analysis used. • Reflexivity.	• As noted in Part 2, there is no single defined process for conducting IPA research. Nevertheless, as a first time IPA researcher, the researcher followed the advice of Smith et al. (2009) and used the steps shown in Appendix J. • The researcher carefully considered her own position, as discussed in Part 2, section 2.12 and Part 3, section 3.7. The researcher took steps to 'bracket' her own experiences and attitudes, but recognises that while interpreting the participants' interpretations, her preconceptions will have influenced her interpretations to a certain degree.

	• The ontological and epistemological stances on which this research is based are explained in Part 2, section 2.2 and expounded upon in Part 3, section 3.2.1. • The researcher has included parts of two analysed transcripts in Appendices O and P for transparency. • A map of themes is shown in Part 2, section 3. • Pertinent quotes are shown in the findings section (Part 2, section 3) but a full table of supporting quotes is in Appendix L.
4. Impact and importance • Does the research have a practical and applied impact for a particular user-group, community, practitioners or policy makers? • Does the research have a theoretical impact through increasing an understanding of a particular issue or creating new understandings? • Does the research have a socio-cultural impact through contributing to positive social change for a particular group?	• The researcher has considered the importance and impact of this research for educational psychologists. It is also hoped that the implications of this research will empower adoptive parents and give them a sense that their voice has been amplified. • Directions for future research are discussed in Part 2, section 4.5 and Part 3, section 4.2. • This study developed from an identified gap in the literature. There was very little UK-based research looking at the perspectives and views of adoptive parents on their children's education. • This research emphasises the complex relationships between adoptive families and schools. It is hoped that the conclusions drawn from this study can inform EP practice when working in the intersection between these two systems and help EPs uphold the rights of adoptive families. • Smith et al. (2009) note that it is not possible or appropriate to generalise the findings of IPA research to the wider population, due to the idiographic nature of the sample, and the fact that the data represents uniquely personal experiences and interpretations. However, the findings of this study may allow other adoptive parents and schools to unlock new ways of thinking about how they can work together to support adopted children.

Appendix N – Explanation of aspects of bioecological systems model in relation to the current study

Systemic level	Systemic aspect	Relevance
Individual	Own experience of education	For many participants, their only previous experience of the education system will have been their own schooling. Their decisions and actions regarding their child's education were likely influenced by their own memories and experiences.
	Prior experience of being a parent	One participant had a child prior to adopting, so had some experience of interacting with schools. Most participants did not have this kind of experience to draw on.
Microsystem	Child(ren)	The participants' children, with their unique characteristics and needs, were a central factor affecting participant's experiences,
	School staff	Similarly, the unique characteristics of the school staff involved in participants' experiences had a significant influence. It could be argued that school staff should be positioned in the exosystem. However, the participant's accounts revealed that the influence of school staff was felt much closer to home.
	Wider family	Members of participants' family (such as spouses and other children) both affected, and were affected by, school-related events.
Mesosystem	Interactions between aspects of micro- and exosystems	This study was designed to explore this level of the model in greatest detail. The mesosystem is the intersection between adoptive parent's immediate systems and those which are further away. Much of the data collected embodies interactions in the mesosystem.
Exosystem	Other parents	Other parents acted provided support, but we also a source of judgement, both real and perceived.
	School ethos	The approach taken by schools on issues such as academic attainment and communication had ramifications for both the participants' and their children.
	Teacher-pupil relationships	Despite not directly involving the participants, this aspect of the exosystem exerted influence over the whole family.

	Other pupils	The friendships formed by participants' children often had a profound emotional impact on the participants, especially when they went wrong. Some participants gave examples of other pupils acting as sources of support for their children.
Macrosystem	Behaviour policies	School behaviour policies were sometimes responsible for inducing shame in participant's children, which reverberated around the wider family and influenced events at home. Schools may have been affected in terms of increased behavioural difficulties.
	Local authority systems	The frustration caused by inaccessible, inflexible and protracted systems impacted both families and schools.
	Support from external professionals	Again, both families and schools felt the impact of positive or negative experiences with external professionals.
	Focus on academic results	Attitudes towards learning and outcomes affected participants' decision making, but also had potential ramifications for their children's future.
Chronosystem	Anxieties about secondary school	The upcoming move to secondary school already loomed large in the consciousness of most participants.
	Child's pre-adoption experiences	Part A of this thesis presented evidence of the power of early experiences, and the thread of early adversity could be seen in some participants' stories about their children.
	Past transitions	Inevitably, experiencing difficulties in the past made the participants' anxious about future transitions, and probably influenced their decision making.

Appendix O – Example of transcript for Mary (Participant 2) with exploratory comments and emergent themes
Emergent themes in left hand column. Exploratory notes in right hand column, green = descriptive, blue=conceptual, pink=linguistic

Emergent themes		Transcript	Exploratory notes
Jekyll + Hyde	173	crafting and artistic things. He loves making things and he	
	174	loves anything where he can dig or look for bugs and	
	175	stuff. Yeah but they're both really... unless you were kind	Appearances can
	176	of with them in the home you probably wouldn't realise	be deceiving.
	177	the extent of their needs 'cause they're both really, they	
	178	appear quite, you know, bright, chatty, sociable, happy	
	179	children.	
	180	I: OK, can you tell me a little bit more about their needs?	
	181	R: Erm, yeah, well. [Son A] has quite a lot of emotional and	BESP needs.
	182	behavioural issues. So, if everything is going really well	
	183	for him, he will be... I don't like to use the word normal	Reluctance to use
	184	but you'll know what I mean if I say it, do you know what	"normal" because it
	185	I mean. He'll be like a normal 7-year-old. Um, the minute	suggests child is abnormal.
	186	something triggers him then he'll kind of go back into	Lower brain behaviour.
	187	survival brain mode. You probably noticed the smashed	
	188	windows on our door. Yeah, that was a shoe got flung at	
	189	that. Erm, yeah, he can be aggressive, he can be violent.	
	190	Really oppositional, really defiant, and very controlling.	
	191	Erm, he will behave much younger, probably 18 months,	Regressive behaviour.
	192	like a 2-year-old, you know, much younger with his	
	193	needs, he'll carry all the time. But outside, unless things	
	194	are really, really bad, then outside he will mask a lot of	Child masking/withholding
11	195	that. So, at school he was a little bit, um, he would call	behaviour at school, then
	196	out when he was supposed to be quiet and he would be	letting it out at home.
	197	quite fidgety and jumping around but he wasn't	
	198	aggressive or disrupt- you know destructive or anything	
	199	like that. [Son B] – again at school – was... he, to all	Able to hide/mask
	200	intents in purposes seemed as though he had no	at school

Recepho. Relationships fely 11+ Hyde. Impat on family.	201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228	additional needs whatsoever. [Son B] is very different in that he will just regress a lot and need a lot of attention. He will get very upset, but he doesn't become violent or anything like that. I: So not externalising in the same way. So, tell me a little bit more then about how things progressed as they went through school. R: Well he was fine in Foundation, he loved it and the staff the staff were amazing. Um, and … I guess it's a really play oriented, nurturing environment with a high ratio of staff and then about February in Foundation I picked him up one day and I could tell that something was wrong and then his behaviour became really challenging out of school. So we would literally leave, I would see his face change, he would be attacking me or his brother all the way home, trying to smash the car windows. Um, and so all our family life was ruled by behaviour like that for about 8 weeks and during that time I had spoken to school, and they were not seeing anything, and I asked [Son A] and he said one day someone was calling him names. But when I tried to ask further, he didn't say and then when I asked again, well I tried to ask in secretive ways, you know what I mean, he wouldn't tell me anything and then after about eight weeks he came home one day and he was just completely happy, just really settled, really regulated, really normal, and sort of pretty together, and I said, oh [Son A], you seem really happy tonight, you must have had a really happy day, and	Attention- neeing behaviour. to stat with Reaption = no problems. stap - relationships with adults Sixth sense almost. Change in behaviour. ruled - completely dominated by son's behaviour. Parent initated the convosation. Behaviour change is rap. d.

42

Friendships	229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241		he said, oh yeah Mummy, XXX wasn't in school today so no one called me names. And XXX is his best friend who, erm, has his own additional needs and I think 'cause [Son A] was making other friends, XXX was trying to keep his attention by calling names, and obviously that had upset [Son A]. So I spoke to his teacher the next morning, and my friend, XXX's mum. And, erm, his teacher spoke to them both, and from that point again it was it was just completely fine, really happy, he was fine. Um, and then... he was completely fine until the August before he went into Year 1, so a couple weeks before he went to Year 1 and his behaviour changed, became again, violent, aggressive, defiant, controlling. Just a nightmare.
	242	I:	And was that mostly at home again?
Reception into Year 1.	243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256	R:	Yeah, yeah, although some of this was, did happen out and about as well which told me that there was something that was really unsettling him. Umm, and... it continued when he went into Year 1, so it was in the I think the end of September when we requested post-adoption support. Um, and they came in and kind of did an assessment and put an application in for the adoption support. But we also had, went in and had a meeting with school and that was when we had our first kind of proper meeting I guess. And we had it with his Foundation teacher because she was the head of Year 1 as well, and because she knew him, and also the Emotional Well-being officer. Erm, and... they were very nice, they, his... Mrs XXX the Foundation teacher had said, look, I don't

Handwritten annotations (right margin):
So a change in Son A's relationship with his friend had, had a huge impact on his behaviour, but only at home School did not see the change, so it was Mum who had to tell them.
Behaviour change around transition.
Nightmare = scary, terrifying.
Parent reading child.
Parent asks for post-adoption support.

"proper" meeting - how is that different.

Familiarity - knowing the child well helps.

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Parent as expert.

Training as a formality.

Parent getting involved in school activities

257	have the experience of attachment and trauma, what do I
258	need to do, can you point me in the right direction. So
259	our social worker had given us, I had, one of my friends
260	worked for the virtual school, so had arranged some, I let
261	her know about free training they could access, and as far
262	as I'm aware, the Foundation stage staff did the
263	attachment training. But nothing really changed for [Son
264	A], they started him doing, um, some work with the
265	Emotional Well-being Officer, but that was really
266	sporadic, like they might pull him out for 20 minutes once
267	every four to six weeks. And... it didn't... So I started, a
268	friend had asked me if I would help her to set up like a
269	friends of the school PTA thing, and that's not me but I
270	thought it will mean that the kids see me at school when
271	there are things like events that might trigger them like
272	discos or stuff I can be there. So I did that and I made
273	sure I went on all the school trips, 'cause I soon found out
274	the first one I didn't go on, we came home and he just
275	wrecked the house completely.

| 276 | I: | What was it do you think he found difficult about that? |

277	R:	Um, it's hard to pinpoint exactly, I mean I guess being
278		taken to a different environment where I'm not there like
279		the attachment figures aren't there, There's no one
280		specifically holding his hand saying OK [Son A], this is
281		what we're going to do, this is what's happening next,
282		this is where we going, I've got my eye on you all the
283		time. We had asked for that at school, and in the initial
284		meeting, they said, we'd asked about the people around

Parent giving advice to teacher/school staff

Staff trainis.
Is training enough?
Does it create change?
Not consistent intervention.

Doing something she wouldn't normally do = making sacrifice.
"I can be there"
Getting involved in school
School trips = difficult.

Change of environment/routine
Acknowledgement/individual attention

4CE

Appendix P - Example of transcript for Karen (Participant 4) with exploratory comments
Emergent themes in left hand column. Exploratory notes in right hand column, green = descriptive, blue=conceptual, pink=linguistic

Left-hand column (emergent themes, handwritten):

Being ignored.

Fighting.

Jekyll + Hyde.

Impact on family

Transcript:

Line	Text
335	class and you seem to be okay. And the day I realized
336	he wasn't okay... Well I did say to, I kept saying to her,
337	he's struggling and she's, no, no he's fine. No he's fine.
338	No, I said he's struggling 'cause [son], we've now
339	discovered is very good at bottling it in school. So he
340	saves it all up, all day and then comes out of school
341	and literally explodes. So and takes it out on me. So
342	he's being very, very violent. Um, and hates going to
343	bed, hates sleep. So we'd have like two or three hours
344	every night of, um, him being violent and disruptive
345	and throwing things and generally wrecking the place
346	and whatever. Um, and then I'd say to, to her, he's
347	not coping. No, he's fine. He's fine. And then the one
348	day, um, she removed Dojo's - oh no, it wasn't Dojo's
349	at the time.
350	I: Like some kind of reward points?
351	R: Yes. Um, a certificate, she had taken a
352	certificate off him last thing on a Friday afternoon and
353	he came out and hid. So he came out, run past me
354	and hid. So, um, I did lots of, oh, I wonder whether
355	you had a bad day in school today? And whatever, as
356	I'm stood talking to a pile of tyres. Um, and he kept
357	popping up and going, yes, yes. And basically, he been
358	told off for fiddling... and um, we had hell all weekend
359	because he'd been told off. He'd had this certificate
360	removed. And all the rest of it. Um, so yeah, went in
361	again, complained. Um, and all she kept saying was,
362	no, he's fine. He's fine. Went to the Head, oh no, he
363	says, she's fine. Um, and I didn't realise, to be honest,

Right-hand column (exploratory notes, handwritten):

Ignored by teacher.

Fighting to be heard.

Holding it in at school, then letting it out at home.

Strong, violent language.

Huge impact on family

Impact on level/family of what happens in school.

Ignored again

Fighting to be believed.

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	364	I feel awful about it now, how stressful he found	Guilt.
	365	school because you don't know what's going on do	
	366	you? I had no idea what's going on between sort of	
	367	nine and three. He wasn't good at telling me. He	
	368	wasn't good at doing emotions, so he could manage	
	369	happy and sad, but everything else was just a funny	
	370	feeling. I've got a funny feeling. Um, and as I say,	
	371	looking back now, I feel really guilty for not realising	Parent expressing shame that
	372	quite so stressful he found school and how he finds	they did not know the
	373	school now.	reality.
	374	I: Okay. So you mentioned earlier you had some	
	375	misgivings about the teacher of that class. Can you tell	
	376	me a bit more about where they came from or what	
	377	they were?	
Individuals	378	R: She was very old school. Um, very shouty. Um,	Older teacher less up to date
	379	quite an abrupt woman. Um, not well liked by people	in her methods.
	380	in general, so it was just one of those - right. Okay.	
	381	Um, so yeah, just not keen... And as I say, my nephew	
	382	had been in her class, um, and I used to pick him up	
Shame.	383	from school so I knew what she was like and it was	
	384	the fact that, um, she would stand on the door and	Shaming of parents at the
	385	go, um, Fred's mum - not a good day today! In front of	end of day.
	386	all the waiting parents.	
	387	I: And did you ever have that experience	
	388	yourself?	

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Shame. Disbelief.
Jekyll + Hyde.

389	R: Um, no because he was always good. So yeah.
390	So we never had [son's] mum, you know, because she
391	wouldn't realise either how bad he was taking things.
392	I: And did you ever talk to her at any point about
393	how it was then coming out at home?
394	R: Yes, yes. Used to say, you know, we're, we're
395	doing this, you know, and having this and that and, no
396	he's, and that's all we ever got, oh he was fine in
397	school. So the implication is then you're rubbish
398	parent cause of, you know, we don't have any
399	problems in school 'cause he's really good.
400	I: Do you think that he maybe was showing
401	some signs in school but maybe they didn't recognise
402	it?
403	R: Yes
404	I: What sort of things?
405	R: He's very fiddly and, um, he tics he does. Uh,
406	so, um, and he, you can see when he's anxious 'cause
407	he's got to fiddle and he can't sit still and he just got
408	to do something. So I think there are lots of signs.
409	There were lots of signs, but they weren't picking up
410	on them. Because the one day she came, she came
411	out to complain he'd, um, vandalised a school rubber.
412	So basically all he'd done was, um, just draw
413	something on this rubber. And I knew why he'd done

Lack of understanding, because child didn't show how he felt.

Disbelief, parent being completely dismissed by teacher

Shame that behaviour is only seen in school?

Lack of recognition / understanding of needs.

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Patronised.	414	it because he was very tired because at this point he	sarcastic, the advice wasn't
	415	wasn't going to bed 'til like, or to sleep 'til like half	actually good.
	416	past 10, 11 o'clock every night. And then he's got to	
	417	be up at like seven at the latest to get to school. So he	Parent feels quite patronised
	418	was very tired and I could see, just sat there with a	by school staff.
	419	pen and just not even realising what he was doing.	
	420	And I said that to her. And, um, and then, um, the TA	
	421	was full of good advice about, you know, not giving	
	422	him his Kindle and if he was violent, taking his Kindle	
	423	off him and all the rest of it. And, um... So yeah, it's all	
	424	quite traditional ideas they had. Um, and as I say all I	
	425	get off, it was, he's fine. And I kept saying to her, no,	
	426	he's not fine. I know he's not fine.	
	427	I: How did you feel when she responded like	
	428	that?	
Parent as expert	429	R: Um, very annoyed not to be taken seriously,	angry, frustrated.
	430	'cause at the end of the day I knew him better than	Parent as expert.
	431	her. Um, I had, you know, with every, all of his	
	432	teachers, um, my husband and I have gone in	
	433	beforehand, explained a bit about [son's] background,	Taking the lead.
	434	so they know he was neglected. You know, we know	
	435	that, you know, not to ignore him. Um, and you know,	
	436	he's hypervigilant, so he needs to be sat at the back of	
	437	the class. So he can see what's going on rather than at	Parents know how best to
	438	the front. Um, you know, and, and that he doesn't	support him
	439	learn unless he's feeling safe. Um, and in the, sort of,	
	440	between the first year and the second year he ended	
	441	up, um, going from one of the top groups to the	
	442	bottom group. Um, and then at move-up day the next	

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Guilt.
Transition

443	time. Um, and I don't think I was as vigilant and on top
444	of things then as I am now cause now I'm in all the
445	time saying, right, what classes is he in, transition,
446	when are we doing this, when are we doing that? I
447	didn't at that point. Um, cause as I say, I don't think I
448	realised, I knew he wasn't right, but I didn't realise
449	quite how stressful and bad school was for him. And
450	he um, he came out of school and said, oh, I'm with
451	Mrs XXX again. And you know when you think... and
452	he was happy about it because he didn't have to
453	change class. So [husband] and I had a conversation
454	about, right, what do we do? So we left it. But yeah,
455	hindsight is a great thing, I should never - I should
456	have moved him. I should've gone in, complained, had
457	him moved to the different, to another class. But he
458	was happy 'cause he was in the same classroom with
459	the same teacher, same TA. So to him that was
460	familiar, just different, slightly different kids.
461	I: So they've sort of moved the classes around
462	about?
463	R: Yes, so he ended up with different children in
464	his class. Um, he ended up with, um, a little girl who's
465	also got major, major issues. Um, used to cause lots
466	and lots of problems, um, and used to wind him up a
467	treat, which she still does.
468	I: So what do you think the impact was on you
469	and your partner during that Year 1?

More expressions of guilt that she didn't pick up on things
Parent taking lead.

guilt again.
Son valued consistency over everything else.

Other pupil's needs impacted on son.
Impact of other pupils in class

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Appendix Q: Superordinate and subordinate themes for all participants, with the emergent themes underlying them

Participant 1 - Donna					
Every school is different	Transitions	Parents taking action	Learning	The power of people	IMPACT!
Choosing schools • Other adopters as source of info • School reputations Staff, knowledge, awareness and understanding • Understanding • Recognition of needs The Approach • Academic pressure • Ethos • Little things make a big difference • (In)flexibility Communication Staff training	Reception to Year 1 From primary to secondary Aspirations • Hopes for the future	Parents as experts • Planning ahead • Parents taking the lead The battle! • Fighting	"Their emotional and mental health is what's important" • Attitudes towards academic progress	The adults who matter • Adult child relationships • Safety/security • Staff changes Friendships • Social maturity Individual differences make the difference	Emotional IMPACT! • Guilt • Gratitude • Disbelief • Jekyll and Hyde IMPACT! on the whole family

Participant 2 - Mary					
Every school is different	Transitions	Parents taking action	Learning	The power of people	IMPACT!
Choosing schools • Other adopters as source of info • First impressions • School reputations Staff knowledge, awareness and understanding • Understanding • Recognition of needs Staff Training The Approach • Academic pressure • Ethos • (In)flexibility Communication • Meetings	Reception into Year 1 The honeymoon period	Parents as experts • Planning ahead • Parents taking the lead The battle! • Fighting Becoming an insider	"Their emotional and mental health is what's important" • Security before learning • Attitudes towards academic progress Sensitivity • Inappropriate topics "He does not want to be lumped in with that group"	The adults who matter Friendships Individual differences make the difference • Other pupils • Supportive professionals • Unsupportive professionals	Emotional IMPACT! • Shame • Guilt • Being fobbed off • Feeling patronised • Broken promises • Disbelief • Jekyll and Hyde IMPACT! on the family

Participant 3 - Susan				
Every school is different	Transition	Parents taking action	The power of people	IMPACT!
Staff knowledge, awareness and understanding • Understanding • Recognition of needs Staff training The school environment The Approach • Academic pressure • Little things make a big difference • (In)flexibility • Exclusion Communication • Meetings	Reception into Year 1	Parents as experts • Parents taking the lead The battle! • Fighting	The adults who matter Friendships Individual differences make the difference • Other pupils • Supportive professionals	Emotional IMPACT! • Shame • Being fobbed off • Feeling patronised • Broken promises • Disbelief • Jekyll and Hyde IMPACT! on the family IMPACT! on others • Staff health/well-being

Participant 4 - Karen					
Every school is different	Transitions	Learning	Parents taking action	The power of people	IMPACT!
Staff knowledge, awareness and understanding • Understanding • Recognition of needs The Approach • Academic pressure • Little things make a big difference • (In)flexibility Communication	Reception into Year 1 The honeymoon period • A good start From primary to secondary Aspirations • Hope for the future	"Their emotional and mental health is what's important" • Attitudes towards academic progress	Parents as experts • Parents taking the lead The battle! • Fighting Becoming an insider	The adults who matter • Adult-child relationships • Safety/security • Staff changes Friendships Individual differences make the difference • Other pupils	Emotional IMPACT! • Shame • Guilt • Being fobbed off • Feeling patronised • Broken promises • Disbelief • Jekyll and Hyde IMPACT! on the whole family

Participant 5 - Linda					
Every school is different	Transitions	Parents taking action	Learning	The power of people	IMPACT!
Choosing schools • First impressions Staff knowledge, awareness and understanding • Understanding • Recognition of needs Staff training The Approach • Academic pressure • (In)flexibility • Exclusion Communication	The honeymoon period • A good start From primary to secondary	Parents as experts • Parents taking the lead The battle! • Fighting	Sensitivity • Inappropriate topics "He does not want to be lumped in with that group"	The adults who matter • Adult-child relationships • Safety/security • Staff changes Friendships Individual differences make a difference • Other pupils	Emotional IMPACT! • Shame • Guilt • Being fobbed off • Feeling patronised • Broken promises • Jekyll and Hyde IMPACT! on the family IMPACT! on others • Staff health/well-being

Participant 6 – Sharon					
Every school is different	Transitions	Parents taking action	Learning	The power of people	IMPACTS!
Choosing schools • First impressions • School reputations Staff, knowledge, awareness and understanding • Understanding Staff training The Approach • Academic pressure Communication	Secondary school	Parents as experts • Parents taking the lead The battle! • Fighting Becoming an insider	"Their emotional and mental health is what's important" Sensitivity • Inappropriate topics "He does not want to be lumped in with that group"	The adults who matter • Staff changes Friendships Individual differences make the difference	Emotional IMPACT! • Shame • Being fobbed off • Broken promises • Disbelief • Jekyll and Hyde

Appendix R – Excerpts from research diary

11.7.19
Transcribing interviews.
- Interview 1 was very procedural and general.
- The words I used were often repeated by respondents.
- Much easier to transcribe when not recorded in a noisy coffee shop!

15.7.19. Transcribing.
It's really hard not to ask leading questions when you're empathising with the interviewee.

24.7.19
Used Temi to transcribe 4th transcript. Still lots of errors so having to go through carefully + correct / anonymise.
Move from Reception to Y1 seem to be a big issue.